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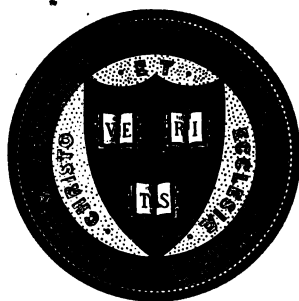
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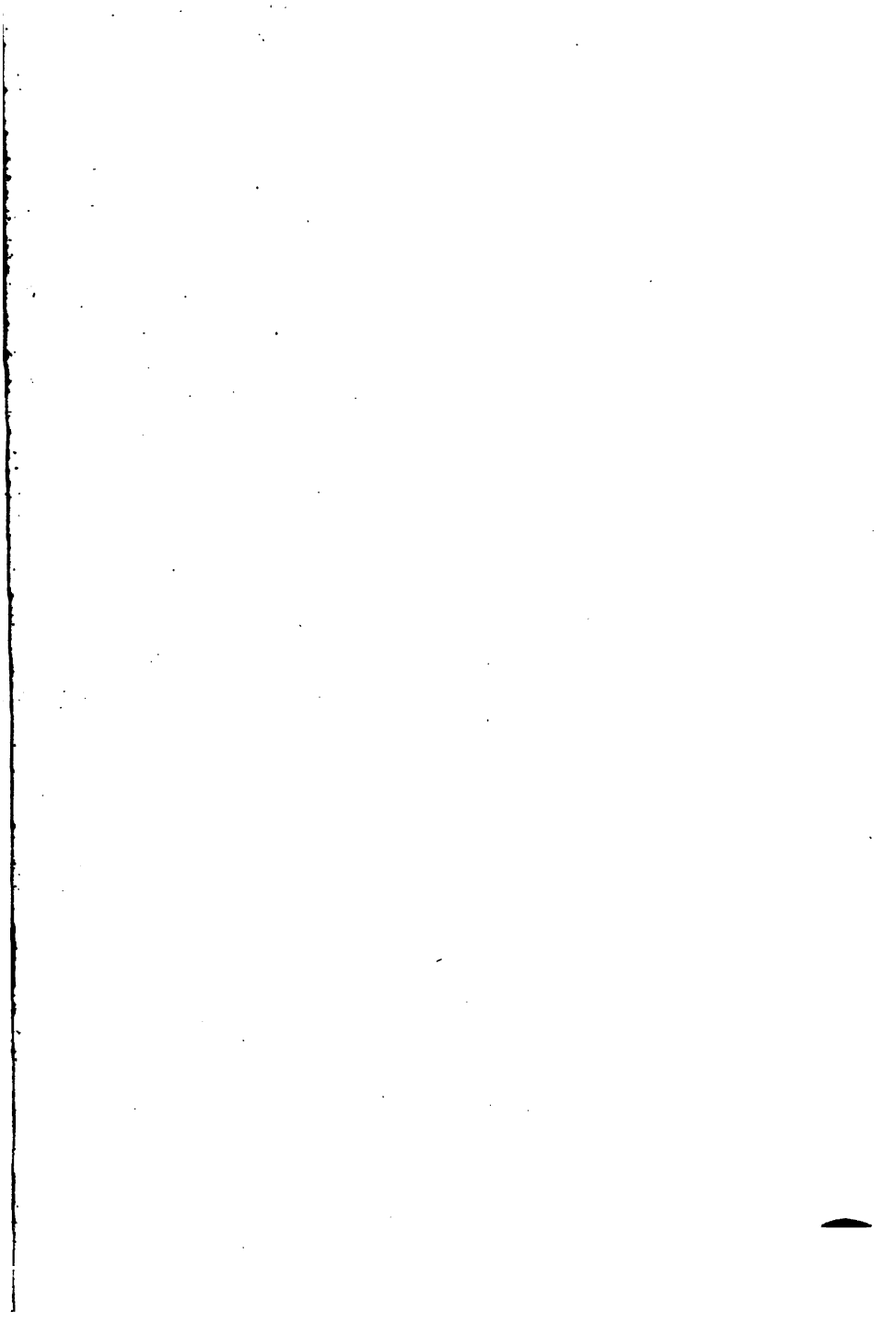
**THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION.**

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*Received 10 July, 1895.*









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# SIMON PETER

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*HIS LATER LIFE AND LABOURS*

BY

*Seymour*  
Chas. S. Robinson, D.D.



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THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

*London, Edinburgh, and New York*

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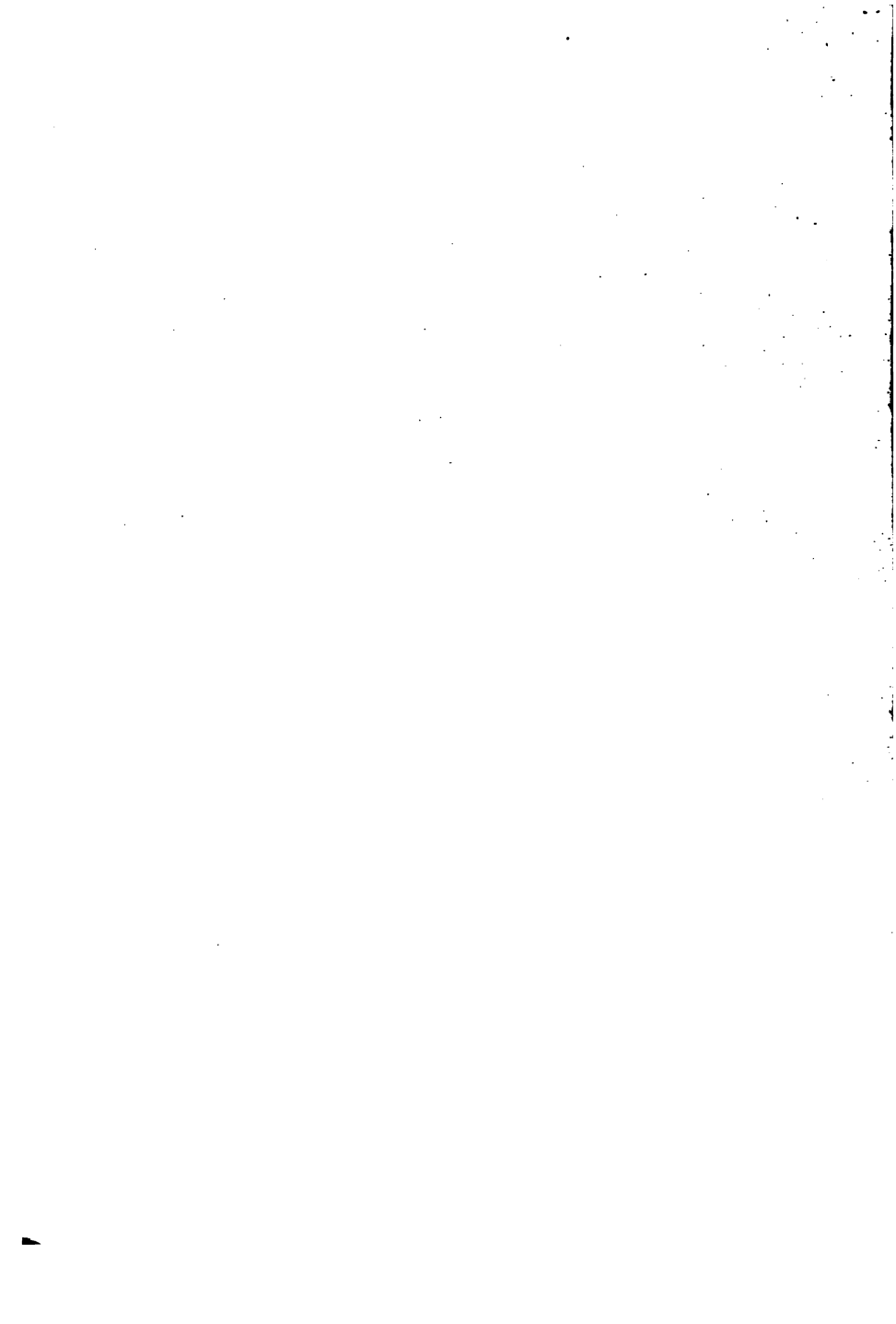
1895

## PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS volume, like that which preceded it, disowns at the outset all pretensions of making a biography of the Apostle to the Circumcision. But it follows the record as it proceeds, takes up every notable incident, and respects each hiatus in the narrative. Sometimes Peter is teaching; more often Peter is taught; and whoever reads thoughtfully what the inspired story contains will be able and glad to secure a valuable part of the instruction for himself. And on the whole it may be possible there will be made quite as vivid an impression of Simon's character and career as there would have been by a more stately book.

CHARLES SEYMOUR ROBINSON.

NEW YORK, October, 1894.



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# SIMON PETER.

## His Later Life and Labours.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### *"NOTHING BUT LEAVES."*

"And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet." — **MARK xi. 13.**

**M**OST readers of the "Pilgrim's Progress" will remember that the Interpreter took Christiana and her family into his "significant rooms," and showed them the wonders he had formerly exhibited to Christian; and then the story runs on thus: "When he had done, he takes them out into his garden again, and had them to a tree whose inside was all rotten and gone, and yet it grew and had leaves. Then said Mercy, 'What means this?' 'This tree,' said he, 'whose outside is fair, and whose inside is rotten, is that to which many may be compared that are in the garden of God; who with their mouths speak high in behalf of God, but

indeed will do nothing for him; whose leaves are fair, but their heart good for nothing but to be tinder for the devil's tinder-box.' "

This was John Bunyan's way of putting into an allegory what he had preached in his famous sermon on the "Barren Fig-tree." It shows the force with which the narrative now coming under our study fastens itself in the popular imagination.

Hence, when it is objected that here was an unnecessary waste of property made by Jesus, we have only to call attention to the fact, that the tree was nobody's property, for it grew "by the wayside"; it was of no value, for it did not bear any fruit; and then to add that this mere piece of wood might well be sacrificed in order to teach the ages so precious and so abiding a lesson as is found in its use as a figure.

The incident is a direct embodiment of the Old Testament parable of the vine which brought forth wild grapes, given in the beginning of the fifth chapter of Isaiah's prophecy. The lessons suggested in that passage are found in the figure: here they are to be looked for in the fact. The miracle becomes a picturesque and dramatic parable of gospel meaning; we shall do well to follow it through its details.

Let us begin with the observation that *God cherishes a reasonable expectation of fruitfulness from all his creatures*. Christ once told his disciples that he had chosen them and ordained them that they



should go and bring forth fruit, and that their fruit should remain.

This story teaches that what the Almighty expects is only *what is befitting and appropriate* to the nature of the being he has made and endowed with a soul. What he looked for in this case was not olives, nor dates, nor spices; he did not come to a fig-tree seeking grapes, nor pomegranates, nor almonds; he sought "figs." "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry. And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find anything thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet."

And what God looks for from the human beings he has created in his own image, is the honest, appropriate fruit of the Spirit in the new heart. Conformity to the Master's image, strict obedience to the divine will, earnest effort for the upbuilding of the Church, meekness and acquiescence under discipline, — these are what he intends, when he says concerning his followers: "Ye shall know them by their fruits." He does not supply men with harps; so he is not waiting for them to sing like seraphs. He does not give men wings; so he does not expect them to fly on the errands of cherubim. He is satisfied with the natural service and devotion of men.

Then, next to this, the story suggests that what God expects is that every individual *shall bring forth*

*his own fruit.* It is not vineyards that bear clusters, but vines. It is not orchards that produce figs, but trees. The all-wise One does not anticipate that one man or one woman, or that a few women and a few men, shall do the whole work in each community, or in each parish. We may be sure he watches these results, and in the reckoning time it will appear that he has understood just how much good has been wrought out by the "hidden ones" of divine love, and how little by the blustering sons of ambition, or the self-complacent daughters of pride. For there is nothing clearer in the Scripture than the declaration that every Christian is held accountable personally, and cannot be lost in a crowd.

The story also teaches that God expects *a proportionate quantity of fruit* from each person. And this would have to be reckoned according to circumstances. Suppose one fig-tree is standing a little better in the sunshine than another; suppose one receives somewhat more of refreshing moisture than another; suppose one has deeper soil for its roots than another; the rule will be — the higher the favor, the richer must be the fruit. The principle of the gospel is all in a single formula: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." Superior advantages extend the measure of our responsibility for usefulness. Health, social position, opulence in fortune, leisure for work, reputation and influence — if there be a Christian who has any or all

of these, he must be ready to hear the Saviour saying, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

Once more: the story teaches that the Master looks for fruit *in the proper time for fruit*. In the case of this tree, "the time was not yet." Figs come before leaves on that kind of tree. So the appearance of leaves assumed the presence of fruit underneath them; but none was there. For some phenomenal reason this fig-tree was a hypocrite. Hence Jesus caught it for a parable with which to teach his disciples, and warn them off from mere profession without performance. God does not in any case come precipitately demanding fruit, as soon as trees are planted; he seems to respect the laws of growth and ripening. He never hurries any creature of his hand. But he gives helps to the end he proposes. He certainly puts realities before shows; figs previous to leaves. And he has no patience or complacency for those who are always making ready, and preparing, and getting started, and setting about things, without any accomplishments or successes. But his direct wrath is levelled against those who add to this fruitlessness the folly and sin of shallow pretense; who, having failed in the figs, hurry out into a more profuse luxuriance of "nothing but leaves."

This leads to a second observation suggested by an analysis of the narrative: *God is sometimes mocked*

*by the proffer of mere professions instead of fruitfulness.* He comes for figs, but he finds "leaves only."

Just here we must be content to take the testimony of those familiar with the natural phenomena to which our Lord refers.

The fig-tree and its habits are familiar to a large portion of the inhabitants of the United States; and what is true of the fig-tree here is generally true of it in Palestine. Bethany and Jerusalem are on high ground, and fruits and harvests there are somewhat later than on the lower ground. In general, it is a very early fig that ripens before the latter part of June, July being the month of figs. To make it a little clearer to those who know all about the figs here, it may be stated that the commonest kind of fig there is the smallish yellow one. The large blue figs, common enough in Egypt, Italy, and Asia Minor, are not abundantly raised in Palestine.

The fig — that is, the fruit (receptacle) with the flowers inside — comes out quite as soon as the leaves, and even a little ahead of them sometimes, and the fruit grows and ripens as the leaves expand. When the leaves are fully spread, the fruit is there if it ever will be. Instances of unusually early fruiting are not by any means unheard of; just as our fruit-trees sometimes blossom in the fall. Every botanist knows that many a plant begins its winter sleep with the next season's flowers quite matured in their



VILLAGE OF BETHANY.



cases, and that a sudden waking up of the plant before its time, in the hot-house, or by an unusual "spell of weather," will cause it to flower and fruit in advance of its season. Of course, as all know, this deprivation of rest is detrimental to the plant. But Jesus' conjecture that fruit might be on the tree is quite in accordance with well-known phenomena in nature, though not common ones, as indeed the expression "if haply" shows.

Figs, like apples, sometimes hang on the tree un-gathered till the next season, and sometimes thus remain good through the winter; but that is not the rule, any more than it is here with the apples. Moreover, it is the *absence* of leaves which accompanies such last year's fruit; and the coming out of the new leaves and figs would cause the old very soon to shrink and wither away.

So now we are ready as before to proceed with our lessons of instruction.

1. It is possible to put all one's religious experience into *mere show*. That is to say, it is possible to feign, or to imitate, or to counterfeit, all the common tokens of a genuine Christian life, and yet possess no realities underneath the pretense. Men may be traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. All this is predicted of these latter times. Professors of religion may appear to love the Church of the

Redeemer, and be nothing but sectarians. They may pray lengthily for a pretense, and devour widows' houses meanwhile. They may "repent," like King Saul, and "believe," like Simon Magus. They may speak "with the tongues of men and angels," and be no better in charity than a cymbal that tinkles. They may cry "Lord, Lord," and yet not do a single thing which the Lord has commanded. And, with all this amount of loathsome hypocrisy in the world, the patient God forbears.

2. The sin of fruitlessness is always aggravated by the bold imposture of *hypocritical cant*. The Scriptures startle a timid student sometimes with their daring demand for clear issues, no matter where they will lead. Christ himself is represented as saying, "I would thou wert cold or hot." Elijah cries out, "If Baal be God, follow him." It is the temporizing, compromising spirit of Naaman which destroys the historic picture of him. And the higher up into conspicuous assumption of sainthood one rises, when his heart is bad, the more offensive are his character and public professions in the sight of a truth-loving God.

"For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds:  
Lillies that fester smell far worse than weeds."

3. Thus we reach our third observation: God will in the end assert himself, and visit on all false professors a *fitting retribution*. The settled, calm,



solemn decision is pronounced from which there is no appeal. "And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it."

There have always been some persons willing to indulge in fault-finding comment upon the action of our Lord in this instance, representing it as a piece of senseless spite against an unintelligent tree, because he was hungry and found no figs. His behaviour was symbolic, we insist, and not simply pettish. The precise temper of mind in which we believe he was at the moment of pronouncing sentence is delineated in the parable of Isaiah that we have alluded to before. Notice there how carefully he calls in human sense of right and wrong to aid in the decision concerning the vineyard of which he expected grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. "Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a wine-press therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants

of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

How plaintively he seems to ask what more he could have done! How sovereignly at the last he announces what he is going to do! It is perversion to say God is spiteful against an insensible thing. It is an intelligent human heart, responsible for its rebellion, to which he represented himself as speaking then. It is an intelligent human heart to which he is speaking by his action, when he works this miracle of judgment upon the barren fig-tree. It will be a sorrowful moment for any fruitless professor of religion when Christ, disappointed in his expectation, stands silently looking at him.

A few reflections, which lie like lessons under the eaves of this story, might well be mentioned as it closes.

The punishment of fruitlessness is *permanent disability* to produce fruit.

Fruitlessness kills the soul of man from root upwards: he is *never able to help* again.

Christ did not curse that tree in any other form or measure than to *leave it to itself*: then it withered.

## CHAPTER II.

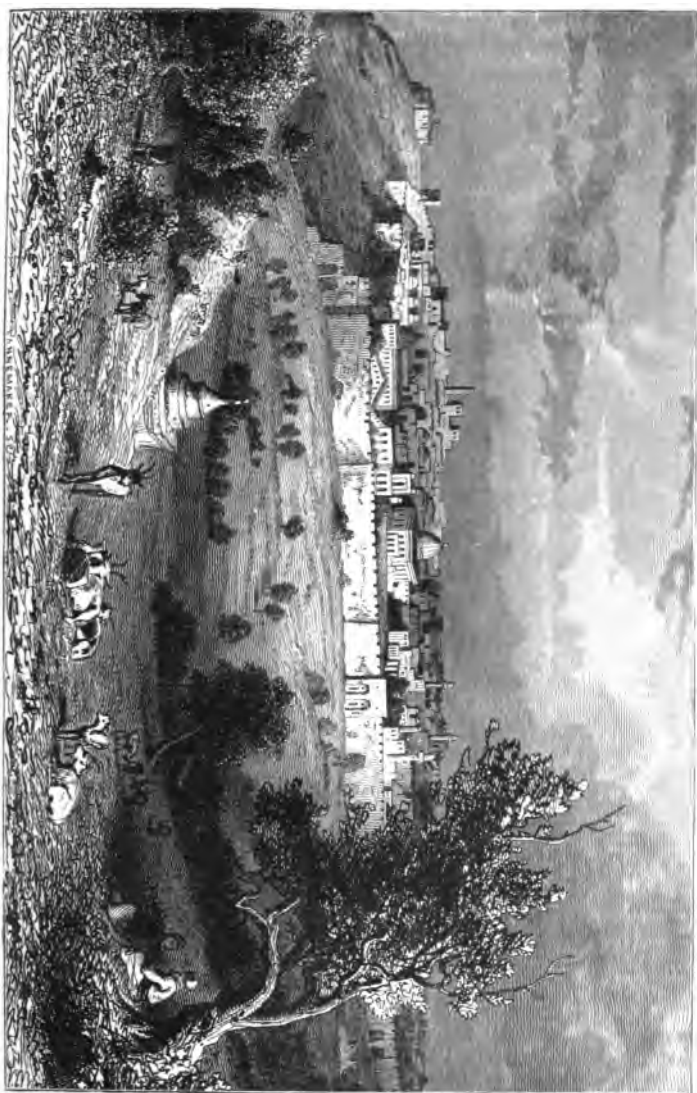
### *THE BETHSAIDA MEN'S QUESTION.*

"And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?"—**MARK** xiii. 3, 4.

**I**F, in seeking to delineate the processes of providence by which the character of Simon Peter was fashioned, the incidents in his exciting life become so picturesque and instructive to ourselves that, now and then, we find their relation to him personally is overshadowed, in a measure, it is not easy to say how such a result can be helped. The only thing a preacher can do is to keep on reminding his hearers forcibly and persistently that the man is in the audience when our Lord is speaking, and that the discourse was meant for his instruction. Here, for example, a small group of Bethsaida disciples come together to ask a question, and Jesus makes a long answer, introducing a theme fraught with significance as an admonition to them all, and particularly meant to have a bearing on this apostle's work in propagating the new gospel by establishing the churches

throughout the known world. We must give our minds intently to what follows, for its own sake, as well as for a help in understanding the effect it produced on this man's ministry.

The story is this : On Tuesday evening, near night-fall, Jesus withdrew from the temple-court where he had met the Greeks who wished anxiously to "see" him, and passed around the corner of the wall in which the vast masses of foundation-stones were to be seen ; one of the crowd that followed him remarked concerning the prodigious size of these old fragments of masonry, and he replied that in a little while not one of them all would be lying upon another. The silence of utter consternation fell on the company, which thinned out as they wound their way along the steep pathway down the hill, crossed the valley of Jehosaphat, and moved on up the slope of Mount Olivet till they reached the familiar spot where the road to Bethany turns, from which the view of Jerusalem is most extensive. There our Lord paused and sat down. After a solemn survey of the town, John and Peter and James and Andrew — Bethsaida men all of them — resumed the conversation. They spoke hesitant and frightened words at first; they talked to him "privately"; for the language Jesus had used was almost inexplicable to them; in the estimation of the chief-priests it would be considered almost blasphemy for a man to say such things against the temple. Let us read over



JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.



the account given by Mark, for he received from Peter's lips what he wrote. "And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering, said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, over against the temple, Peter, James, and John, and Andrew, asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled? And Jesus answering them, began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."

Now it is not too much to say that Jesus Christ never before uttered words that taxed the trust and acquiescence of Simon Peter specially so much as these did. There were in them two things in particular that must have fairly revolutionized this disciple's opinions, his traditional beliefs, his personal convictions and habits of thought in religious lines for a lifetime. When his Lord told him that this sacred edifice was to be torn all to pieces, Simon foresaw that this was to be the absolute downfall of his nation. He did believe it, and the man went over for ever from Judaism to Christianity in that instant of vast and astonishing disclosure. And when Jesus told him further that they were to be on

the watch against strange and false Christs, then a fresh sensibility and a sweet strength came into his heart, concerning "the decease Jesus should accomplish at Jerusalem," of which he learned earliest on the mount of transfiguration, where three of these same Bethsaida fishermen heard Moses, Elijah, and Jesus talking about it.

So let us think a moment what new considerations were put in the mind and heart of this loving disciple. The Jewish hierarchy were, in these days of awful trial, as solid in their murderous bigotry as were the great stones of their temple; but bigots and stones would together be torn up from their foundations, and Jerusalem would be on "heaps."

Moreover, this man's solitudes were at their highest; Jesus in three or four days was going away; Jesus would be dead; but the Christ of God was to be alive once more, and Jesus the Christ would come back again, his panoply the clouds, and his scepter the sword of Michael!

The rest of this address of the Master is scattered around in an interesting and effective way among the narratives of the evangelists. Matthew remembered that Jesus said there should be "wars and rumours of wars, famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes." Luke added that the same discourse contained warnings of "fearful sights and great signs." Three of them recollected how the Master foretold the "divisions" that would tear families asunder, and "defec-



tions" that would split churches. Luke wrote down some sentences predicting that they, these disciples, should be arrested, and persecuted, and hated, and beaten, and a multitude of martyrs should be put to death. But the same kind Voice, so these all put on record, promised that not a hair of their heads in the end should perish, if in patience they possessed their souls. And then Luke continues the account with a passage that we must give as it stands; Mark has the same almost, so we know Simon Peter heard it too: "And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh."

This is as far as we can go now in our analysis of this remarkable discourse of our Lord. It is the most wonderful that he ever gave to his disciples, the world, and the ages. It began with a question a single hearer asked; it ended with a disclosure of the vast future; it told many mighty mysteries and taught many momentous lessons; but after all, it did not even attempt to answer the question, "Tell

us, when shall these things be?" It closes with an asseveration of truth, with an admission of ignorance. Jesus says he does not know the dates these Bethsaida men asked; God his Father reserved them wholly to himself: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, until all these things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. But of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is."

Much remains to be studied; but now we ask concerning the admonitions which the Bethsaida men gained thus far; for we propose for our own good to profit by their gains. Remember that what Mark records he got from Simon Peter; and what Peter heard is all to our advantage.

1. For example, let us note at the outset the suggestion brought to us concerning the inevitable melancholy of human foresight.

These disciples were artlessly admiring the vast stones lying at the foundation of the temple. Their imagination was caught by the exquisite beauty of what was probably the finest edifice this world ever saw. Sometimes, although we have looked at a building a hundred times before, there comes a singular shining or a fresh shadow in the atmosphere that seems to give a brighter or a softer loveliness to it.

The architecture takes on an increase of attractiveness, and we enthusiastically exclaim, "Could there ever have been such a structure as that? See those stones! Just look at this edifice!" Thus those simple-minded lovers of the temple said to Jesus Christ, when they came out from worship one morning. But our Lord was able to read the future, and he answered with a sigh of dejection: "It will all soon go to ruin. In a little while there will not be left one of those majestic stones lying upon another!" That was the melancholy of even his foreknowledge.

God knows the end from the beginning; it is a great mercy that a human being is denied such a damaging foresight. What if one must reply to every exclamation of gentle praise with a dismal and forlorn opinion concerning the final wreck? What if we saw Napoleon at the top pinnacle of his splendour, and should have to cry out, "Oh, yes! but he is on his way to St. Helena." One happens to say: "What a writer is this new author of *Waverley*!" And we, knowing the future, must answer, "he will die in poverty, and with a mind so weakened that, when his own book is read aloud to him, he will ask, 'Who is the author of that?'" A musician is making matchless melody; some enthusiast praises; you have to say, "She will be palsied in her throat before she reaches ten more years of age!" You see your neighbour's son, promising and kind, or he shows you his daughter, fair and beloved; knowing

the time to come for each, you have to tell him that the one will be shipwrecked or buried at sea, and the other will be suffocated with fire next summer, or become a hopeless invalid, with her brain delirious and foolish. Ah me! it would require only a brief experience to teach us all how much wiser and kinder God is than we had supposed, in hiding the sad unknown.

2. Next, there is a lesson here concerning the fruitlessness of that curiosity which is only a persistent inquisitiveness.

Just notice that, after all this solemn warning which Jesus gave his disciples, they still took the first opportunity to draw him aside and begin to inquire after dates and details and particulars, as if they really desired to know when and how that glorious temple was thus to be wrecked with utter overthrow. What good would it do them to get acquainted with the steps of ruin? One of the great homilists of England has lately published a scheme for a sermon, with these verses for his text. He entitles it, "Men admiring doomed things." He takes the widest range for his illustration: secular interests, like markets, armies, governments, navies, are doomed things; artistic productions, as for instance, paintings, statues, buildings, are doomed things. Then he speaks of social distinctions: ranks, titles, ribbons, primogenitures, — all of these are doomed things; ecclesiastical systems, hierarchies

or establishments, sectarianisms, garments, sounding names, and the like, certainly are doomed things; finally, the world itself, one vast ruin, with marks of wrath on its whole visage, is doomed soon to be burned.

Is there any good to be found in trying to trace the footsteps a destroying angel is going to make, when we are sure he is coming? The better way to occupy our minds is in settling what footsteps we are in our desperate need going to take, when the day of destruction is nigh. There are limits even to safe study of prophecy in the Bible. History has proved how fascinating it is as a theme of research. But in large classes of students many will be found who have become nothing more or less than cranks, whose visionary theories have disturbed the uneducated, and pestered the sober-minded into a petulant rejection of truth.

## CHAPTER III.

### *COMING AS THE LIGHTNING COMES.*

“For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”—**MATTHEW xxiv. 27.**

**I**F, in speaking of any modern minister, one is overheard to say, “He believes in the Second Advent,” do not some bystanders immediately infer, with a sort of pitiful regret, that he is a religious crank?

Two things at once have lately come to my observation. Upon the public platform at an anniversary meeting, a speaker, excitedly alluding to the common or orthodox view, exclaimed: “Why! Christ has been coming constantly; he has been coming ever since Adam sinned; he has been all the time coming; he has been coming ever since he went away!” Then followed applause, as if the audience felt relieved.

Then in several later collections I found a hymn which I thought was on the whole good for certain uses in sanctuary service. It opens with the line, “Jesus came, the heavens adoring,” and consists of

five stanzas, each of which mentions two ways in which "Jesus comes." That is to say, it declares ten forms of manifestation in the advent of our Saviour, all voiced properly near the last with the line, "Jesus comes, whate'er befalls us." What can be the meaning of such a statement has no explanation unless the usual phraseology might be accepted, namely, "a spiritual coming is intended." In a fine and welcome sense this is certainly true; but if the purpose is to antagonize the old view which is found in all our theologies of Christ's personal coming, it is not.

Was this the lesson which was given to the four Bethsaida men on the slope of Mount Olivet looking over the doomed Jerusalem? When our Lord said that the Son of man was coming again, did he mean that there would be simply a spiritual advent in ten different ways to believers? Is there any real agreement to be found anywhere upon the general subject which this discourse introduced, and which moved Simon Peter so?

One expression there is which Jesus Christ employed twice; it is remarkable for a figure of speech the most forcible and picturesque he ever gave to the world. It refers to one special coming of his at the last day of this dispensation; it certainly suggests that this will be conspicuous beyond all possibility of mistake or confusion: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even

unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not."

This our Lord said on two occasions months apart in time; before different audiences, once the Pharisees, once his disciples; in localities widely separated, once in Perea, once on the Mount of Olives; in nearly the same language, and with exactly the same comparison. He is surely to be understood as meaning that the Lord would come in person, and every human being would know it when he did come, just as plainly, so the figure says, as he would know when the lightning lit the sky.

That does not mean a "spiritual coming," whatever the expression is designed to signify on the lips of those who use it. There is this personal coming which is distinct from any other sort of coming. What is the doctrine of the churches upon this point? Is there any one who can be trusted to voice it or phrase it to our acceptance safely?

Let us lay alongside of this passage another just as familiar to us as this is, — this one we generally quote as a proof (Acts i. 10, 11): "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye



gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

The most convenient comment for me at this moment is found in the lectures of John Dick, so long a professor, honoured and famous, in the Divinity School of Glasgow. The plain statement of such a man may be considered trustworthy and final, as the utterance of the churches of every name, else there is no force in authority as a help in this discussion. He says, after noting that wonderful spectacle of the "two men in white" who appeared to the disciples straining their tearful eyes after the vanishing form of Jesus: "The chief thing to which the angels called the attention of the disciples, and to which ours should be directed, is the certainty of his (Christ's) second coming; for this is an event which, although an object of dreadful expectation to the unbelieving and impenitent, is fraught with hope and joy to those who love and obey the truth. The person who will appear will be 'that same Jesus who was taken up into heaven,' clothed with the same nature, sustaining the same relations to us, animated with the same love, and carrying on the same gracious design. Ten thousand tongues will hail him with accents of exultation and triumph: 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be

glad and rejoice in his salvation.' Then shall the disciples be again gathered to their Master, and the sheep to their Shepherd. Oh, how joyful the meeting, so long promised, so eagerly expected! It will be the day of the gladness of his heart, to behold around him those for whom he died upon the cross, and has ever since ministered in heaven. It will be a source of ineffable felicity to them to see him whose glory was the subject of their contemplations in this world, to be taken under his immediate care, to be admitted to the most intimate fellowship with him, and to know that no event shall ever separate them again. Such was the comfortable prospect which the words of the angels gave to the disciples; and we need not wonder that their fears and sorrows were dispelled, and that, as we are informed in another place, 'they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.'"

It may be assumed, then, that this is the creed of the churches, as interpreted by one of the soundest expositors of modern times. But as a single text is not altogether conclusive when kept away from what may be "the analogy of the faith," we come at once to the broader form of inquiry: What is really the orthodox doctrine concerning the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, as deduced from the whole Scriptures?

Now, I presume I could be trusted to fashion the

answer to my own question, and phrase the common belief in language of my own choosing; and I certainly could write it out more expeditiously than I could patiently copy the words of others. But I judge it would be safer, when I am seeking to command a calm conviction, to rehearse some considered and published formulas of statement of one whom we are all disposed to honour. I do not forget that Charles James Fox said, "Great authorities are arguments." So I turn with implicit confidence and a real delight to the testimony of Charles Hodge, — *clarum et venerabile nomen*, — as an authority whose teaching will carry weight the moment it is given.

"The common church doctrine," he says, "is that there is to be a second, personal, visible, and glorious advent of the Son of God, and that the events which are to precede that event are: First, the universal diffusion of the gospel, or, as our Lord expresses it, the gathering of the elect; this is the vocation of the Christian Church. Second, the conversion of the Jews, which is to be national; as their casting away was national, although a remnant was saved, so their conversion may be national, although some may remain obdurate. Third, the coming of Antichrist." According to his custom, Dr. Hodge immediately proceeds to rehearse and discuss these points, one after another, seeking to establish them with an extensive citation of passages from every

part of the Word of God, and settling steadfastly each in its turn.

But he pauses in the beginning to pay his respects to one modern school of objectors who are accustomed to explain everything said anywhere about the second advent as if it were a mere mystical affair and the language must refer to some "spiritual" manifestation of his power, and not to any bodily or conspicuous personal coming. He admits freely that the words "coming of the Lord" are often used in the Scripture passages for any signal manifestation of the Saviour's presence either for judgment or mercy. He says: "There is a coming of Christ, true and real, which is not outward and visible." And he quotes texts that are quite to the point as proofs. But then he proceeds to defend his main proposition; namely, that, beyond all this, the Bible teaches a second appearing of the Son of God, which will be "visible and glorious."

1. This he argues, first, from the analogy between the second and first advents. As the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was predicted to be and certainly was personal and visible, so his second coming must be a personal and conspicuous coming. "The advent in both cases is predicted in very nearly the same terms." And then he quotes Acts iii. 19-21: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times

of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive, until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of his holy Prophets since the world began."

2. Then, again, it is argued from the explicit assertions of the Scriptures that the second advent must be visible and personal. Hence the earliest of proof-passages adduced in that verse (Acts i. 9-11) to which we have made allusion already. Dr. Hodge does not seem to think this needs any exposition; he adds only one pithy comment: "His second coming is to be as visible as his ascension; they saw him go, and they shall see him come." There he drops it; it will be "this same Jesus."

3. In the next place, the circumstances attending the second advent prove that it is to be personal and visible. It is to be "in the clouds; with power and great glory; with the holy angels; with all the saints;" it is to be "with a shout, and the voice of the archangel." "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." "And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

4. Once more: the effects ascribed to Christ's second advent are such as to prove that it will be

personal and visible. All the tribes of the earth shall mourn; the dead, both small and great, are to rise; the wicked shall call on the rocks and hills to fall on them and cover them from the vision of Jesus' face; the saints are to be caught up to meet him in the air; the heavens and the earth are to flee away at his presence. There can be no such effects from any spiritual advent.

5. To all this Dr. Hodge adds for his fifth and final argument a grouping of passages to show that the inspired apostles all understood Christ to predict and promise his second coming in person. They spoke again and again of this as their chief joy and expectation, as the one "blessed hope" for all believers. Note specially 1 Thess. iv. 14-18. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Our task is finished just here: this is the common view concerning the Second Advent. It is of no use to attempt to discharge passages like these of their meaning with a mere platform declamation.

Not in this sense—not in answer to these predictions and promises, which every one finds in the New Testament—has our Lord been “coming again ever since he went away.” He has not been here at all since the grand ascension morning. He has never yet once come in any such manner that we may consider the prophecies fulfilled. Lightning is remarkable for two peculiarities which are inalienable, inimitable, and unmistakable. It always strikes suddenly, and it is always conspicuous when it falls through the heavens “out of the east even unto the west.” No one with his senses about him could miss such a thing as a flash of lightning.

No: not if one were watching for it with a purpose. And this is the entire aim of our Lord in these final chapters of the various Gospels: he is insisting that we shall be on the watch for his sudden return to the world. Simon Peter particularly remembered, and so related to Mark, that in this great discourse of his Jesus foretold that it would be very sudden; might be at evening, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning; and every believer must be careful lest it should find him sleeping. If each one would only be on the alert, and keep expecting and looking up, he would surely see the triumphant display in the sky. He could not miss it, any more than he could miss an uncommon flash of lightning, cutting athwart the entire heavens, kindling the firmament from

horizon to horizon. Hence came the warning so familiar and yet so neglected in our time: "Watch therefore: for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

Does any one who missed his opportunity of seeing the sunrise on the Rigi remember how sorry he was afterwards to think he first missed the sound of the horn which warned him a half-hour before to come from his room out on the terrace so as to be ready? Alas! many a man shall think of the warnings he disregarded as well as the chances he lost.

There was in the papers, a little while ago, the story of a faithful peasant who lived out in the Welsh Mountains. He was poor and simple, not knowing much of the great world around him; but he much loved the Lord that loved him enough to die for him. And he used to go every night out under the stars just before he sought his bed, and also a moment before dawn, so as to see if he could find any sign of the dear Saviour's arrival. Men laughed at his simplicity; but he kept it up a whole lifetime, year after year, with a wistful longing. Is it a fact, will it prove positively true, that you and I will one day look on the face John knew so well, and Peter never forgot, and Mary loved to meet in the gloaming at Bethany? Shall we know him when he comes? Will he be glad to be told how trustfully we have waited for him, and how long



we have kept talking to each other about him? How pleasant it appears to us, now that we learn it is so real, that he may be here almost any hour! And when he comes, we can say, "We were watching for thee!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### *THE ONE SURE SIGN OF CHRIST'S ADVENT.*

"And the gospel must first be published among all nations." —  
MARK xiii. 10.

WE return to the narrative found in Mark's Gospel, and occupy an essential space of exposition in mere recapitulation. Our purpose can be served by noting our progress as far as it has gone, and in seeking a few more important lessons which must have permanently impressed the mind and swayed the after career of Simon Peter; for it is he that put them all into his own memory and communicated them to this evangelist.

These four Bethsaida men asked Jesus when the things he had foretold should be, and what was the sign of their coming they should look for. And we have seen that our Lord declared that he could not fix any date, for he did not know. No man knew — "no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." The one First Person of the Adorable Trinity had reserved "these things" to himself. Still Jesus bade them watch; and then

he mentioned some particulars, and set before them some events, which would show when the day was "at hand."

So we have now the interesting task of tracing out the admonitory truths which were taught them — and through them ourselves — in the entire rehearsal, and in the matchless discourse that followed it.

1. Thus we reach a new suggestion: There is a hint here concerning the fatal imposture and peril of using mere omens as "signs of the times," and recklessly predicting the speedy "end of the world."

The French have two quaint sayings which the common people quote in their bright conversation. One is this: "Some things happen almost every year;" the other is, "It is always the unexpected that happens." Perhaps there is no literature in this world more hopelessly bewildering than that which is found in the volumes issued at the present day, containing the "proofs" of the end of the world. Accounts of terrible earthquakes, of eruptions of volcanoes, of wars among the nations, disasters upon the sea and on the land, fairly blaze with horror. And in an instant all these remarkable "signs" are dashed over upon one's imagination to show that the heavens would soon be "rolled together as a scroll," and all the stars would fall out of heaven, — which last unexpected quotation brings abruptly on the story of the largest meteors a dazed

neighbourhood ever looked upon, just reported in some Western paper for the alarm of the populace and the awakening of the impenitent.

Even the best of preachers will sometimes err and hurt an excellent cause by trying to prove too much. It is the exaggerations of an uninvited series of interpreters which have done most to discredit the truth concerning the premillennial advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. A visionary and sensational habit of marshalling together such natural or political, such providential or social, occurrences as one thinks will make for a certain person as Antichrist or a certain date for the last judgment, or a certain nation as a little horn, throws ridicule upon a great article of faith held by some of the soberest and most spiritual of men. There was a child who once told her mother that she did not like those things she was told in the Sunday-school, and was rebuked with a warning against finding fault with her teacher. She instantly surrendered, only flinging behind her the Parthian arrow: "He certainly is a scholar in the Bible, but he knows too many things which *are not so!*"

2. The next lesson will help this one; we see the necessity for discriminating study of facts when laid alongside of prophecy.

The danger of knowing too many things which *are not so*, gives not the least reason for one's thinking he has no right to know what *is so* when God

has revealed it. Jesus tells his disciples here that deceivers will come; he admits that there will be wars and earthquakes, famines and troubles, but the end would not be yet. Indeed, "such things must needs be," and there would be worse ones coming later,—for "these are the beginning of sorrows." And the people of God must just go on studying prophecy in a calm and considerate way, and watching for some real evidences that the world is drawing near the hour for the beginning of the new heavens and the new earth. This would occupy misspent time, and prevent one from running loose into visions and vagaries.

A thoughtful Christian can keep abreast of his age, and still be conservative and careful at drawing swift conclusions. Let him fasten his mind on present spiritual signs, and not on political calculations belonging to the undisclosed future. Again and again we insist that a great many books have been wasted in showing that the Napoleonic names will spell out "six hundred and sixty-six." It will be best to let any number of frogs and seals and horns pass without notice until we open our eyes with new light in them. There is need of our growing yet more in grace,—the grace of courage and humility. It is worth our united endeavour to find out what the Lord would have our churches to do in these stirring times. We might deem it profitable to keep singing:—

"Great God ! I would not ask to see  
What in my coming life shall be ;  
Enough for me if love divine  
At length through every cloud shall shine.

"Yet this my soul desires to know,  
Be this my only wish below,  
That Christ be mine ; — this great request  
Grant, bounteous God, and I am blest !"

3. Finally, we have here a lesson concerning the one sign of the world's nearing its end: The gospel must be published everywhere.

We are not told that all nations are to become Christian; we are to study the phraseology very carefully. Mark's word is "published among all nations;" Matthew's expression is "preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations." The rulers, the masses, the individual souls, may reject the truth, but it must be offered to them. Then the end will come, and it will not come until then; this we are told.

This is the shortest argument for foreign missions that can ever be constructed. We are not responsible for gathering many converts or conquering empires. Our main task is not in building up churches or amassing wealth for denominational enterprises. This world will not ever be renewed in righteousness until the truth is known everywhere.

This is going to be a very dangerous work for believers. Persecutions are going to return again.

Leviathan will not be drawn out of this ocean of corruption with a hook. There will be scourgings of the body and trials of the soul; there will be arrests and inquisitions in the presence of tribunals of so-called justice; there will be witnesses that will lie, and brothers that will slander, and friends who will betray; families will be broken up, and parents will testify against a child, and children will swear to the destruction of a parent. So the true man will have the worst of it, and be hated for his fidelity.

But the passage closes with a voice as of a silver trumpet singing out the notes of triumph in the air; the man that endures unto the end is sure to be saved. There is an element of necessary antagonism, inevitably to be heated into exercise in proportion to the genuineness of the experience, in all true piety; if it becomes efficient, it makes enemies. Even a pointed bar of iron will cause a whole ocean to hiss, if it be hot enough to demand notice. It is easy to be a shirk and be a sneak; it is hard to be faithful; but the faithful will be saved.

Somewhere, I have met lately the story of a minister who was busily occupied with preparing a sermon on this text: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." He became so excited that he could not sleep, and so dreamed he was taken to the other world; there he attended a meeting of lost angels, who were planning

to hinder the gospel, help establish Satan's kingdom, and destroy what God was doing to save the souls of men. One said he thought a new deputation should be sent into the world to assure men that the Bible is a falsehood, and ought to be treated as an uninspired fable. "Oh, that is too old!" replied another. "The mothers would go on believing, and telling their children it is true; it would be better to spread abroad the statement that some parts of the Scriptures had been found in an Eastern convent a thousand years old, and these proved there could be only heaven at last for anybody who was moral." They all cried out in dismay, that even the fools on the earth knew better than that. Then one, who looked as if he were the wisest of them all, arose, and said quietly: "We never have really succeeded in anything except this; keep sending more and more of the devil's preachers to hold back God's ministerial workers from urging the people to be in a hurry; tell them always that there is a hell, and there is a heaven; that the earth is to grow old, and be burned up, but not yet, not yet; there will be time enough; there is plenty of time; the world is nowhere near being converted unto God, and that is a prime condition; keep everything still and listless, and then hold out your nets to catch the lost souls that perish, falling down through the bogs of worldliness into our clutches." Then a murmur of applause was heard, deep and awful, from the fiends around.



## CHAPTER V.

### *CHRIST WASHING HIS DISCIPLES' FEET.*

"Then cometh he to Simon Peter : and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" — JOHN xiii. 6.

IT is to be understood that this incident now before us occurred while Jesus was in the midst of the celebration of what we have learned to call the Lord's Supper. The chapter, therefore, introduces us into one of the most interesting and sacred of all the scenes of the Bible.

Our first lesson is concerning the significance of the extraordinary character of Jesus' earthly life. We have often been exhorted to remember that, because Christ was the Word, everything which the Word did was itself word. That is to say, we must search for doctrine in his behaviour. Before he sat down to the table, he seems to have openly decided that nothing should ever separate him from those whom he came to save. He knew that the time of his shame and suffering was at hand; but he was going to love his chosen disciples, and was going evidently to show them that he loved them, to the

very end of his career as their Master and Friend. Even while in full view of the garden and the cross, he would still keep them in his patient and faithful heart. That is the final picture of our Lord: he wishes even to the uttermost to save any one, and every one, who will come unto the Father by him.

So another lesson: the communion-table is one of the places, perhaps the likeliest, where Satan expects to make most conquests. It is always the darkest side of the unseen world that a thoughtful child of God seems to imagine, when he reads such a story as this. How this one verse displays the contrasts of Christian life and exposure! Here are the two kings of the antagonistic kingdoms, — Immanuel and Satan. A group of mortal souls are in the conflict, — ten loving friends, one unsuspecting coward, one already pledged enemy. See these motives; love in Jesus' heart, treachery and hate in Satan's. It was not "after they had supped," but while the Supper was on, or during its progress; the new revision has corrected the mistake of our old version. There is a strange correspondence of word to word in the language: the devil having "devilled" it into the heart of Judas; the archer having shot his shaft, the sharp arrow of fatal suggestion of betrayal, into the man's mind; one of the fiery darts of the wicked: this is the intense figure in the expression. But this did in no respect relieve Judas' responsibility; he was intelligent in guilt.

It is important that we should apprehend the next lesson as it meets us: Christ, the Captain of our Salvation, had an actually omniscient understanding of the purpose and result of the conflict. His eye saw clear down the current of events; he knew that Judas was to betray him, Simon Peter was to deny him, before he should be dead on the cross. A grand magnanimity, therefore, was in his action. It seems wonderful for him to wash the feet of those two persons. But he understood that the plan was settled; he should go to his Father in despite of everything; Peter would be saved at last, and Judas would go to his own place. So he moves on serenely in his work. It lifts the whole thought of human redemption up into the heights of indescribable majesty just to remember that our Leader is master of the position from the beginning.

We learn, also, that there are some graces which can be made conspicuously clear better by example than by mere description. Jesus came to minister, not to be ministered unto; so now, being about to do a waiter's work, he assumes a waiter's habit. He lays off the garment which is to become historic,—the seamless robe that the Roman soldiers will cast lots for by and by; he binds the servant's napkin around the tunic which remains. Jeremy Taylor makes a lively comment very well here when he says, "When the holy Jesus had finished his last Mosaic rite, he descends to give example of the first

fruits of evangelical grace." It would not be possible, in the poverty of human speech, to express a feeling so delicate as humility in any form of words more forcibly than an action like this expresses it. Perhaps it would be well to remember a suggestion so weighty; for humility is a grace that has been talked about in this world of ours far more than it has been exhibited.

It seems worth our while to dwell for a moment upon the picturesqueness of this scene as Simon Peter sat in full view of it, and of the illustration it gave him of the wonderful condescension of his divine Lord. We must remember that this disciple, so far from having any precedence over the others in such a transaction, had a full view of it in all its particulars before his turn came to share in it. The Lord did not begin with Peter; he began with the others, and we are not told how many submitted quietly to the washing previously. The expression, "Then cometh he to Simon Peter," shows plainly that this disciple had a very suggestive time for watching and meditating upon the spectacle. How curious it always seems to us to imagine Simon learning his lessons in the Lord's school!

The action possessed a local signification to those at that table which we in Western lands might very easily fail to appreciate. It was one of the most welcome and at the same time one of the most menial attentions shown in that climate to guests.

It was performed only by servants, and was a mark of special courtesy by the master of the feast.

The form which was observed is well described in the Researches of Dr. Edward Robinson. "Our youthful host," says he, "now proposed, in the genuine style of ancient hospitality, that a servant should wash our feet. This took me by surprise, for I was not aware that the custom still existed here. Nor does it, indeed, towards foreigners, though it is quite common among the natives. We gladly accepted the proposal, both for the sake of the refreshment and of the scriptural illustration. A female Nubian slave accordingly brought water, which she poured upon our feet over a large shallow basin of tinned copper, kneeling before us and rubbing our feet with her hands, and wiping them with a napkin. It was one of the most gratifying minor incidents of our whole journey." It is evident that the ordinary attentions had in some way been omitted in the case of the disciples at the Last Supper, and after their long and heated walk along the dusty path it would be likely to be missed. Now in the midst of the feast Jesus, the master at the table, seems to have intended special significance to his action, something spiritually suggestive, and meant to give a lesson of instruction. Some of us familiar with the pathetic diary of the delicate-minded Henry Martyn will recall a passage showing the direction which an alert imagination would be sure to take

under such a service. He says: "A slave in my bedroom washed my feet. I was struck by the degree of abasement expressed in the act; and as he held the foot in the towel, with his head bowed down towards it, I remembered the condescension of the blessed Lord."

Once more: we learn here that a true believer needs to accept from his Lord everything he sends with the same spirit of tranquil acquiescence. Chief benedictions are to be taken gently and gratefully. If Jesus asks us, in some vast revelation of exalted experience, to go up Mount Tabor, let us modestly open our heart to see the transfiguration he offers. If he would be a slave at our feet, let us receive so matchless a condescension with an admiring and abashed love. Now this whole scene rises upon our minds with graphic clearness. We are irresistibly led to picture to ourselves the possible emotions of consternation and surprise in the disciples; they knew there was a stupendous incongruity in an act like this. But it illustrates the loyalty of an unquestioning obedience in their hearts that they interposed no objection, for some little distance down the line. Our imagination is certainly impressed with the unlowered dignity the Son of God displays even in the discharge of a service so menial. Some of those there must have sat with wonder, embarrassed, confused, yet too well trained in a reverent faith to expostulate, though they knew

heaven was stooping to earth. But they quietly received what grace their Lord meant to give.

So, then, we find ourselves entering somewhat thoroughly into the spirit of what our Saviour meant when he said, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet." There was only one thing that he could possibly mean: personal humility is the specific theme of his teaching by word and by act; and it would be mockery for us to seem to accept it with any other reference. There may be utmost ostentation in a formal ceremony of imitating Christ's example here. On Thursday of Holy Week in Rome a few old paupers, after due private preparation, are brought up before the Pope for the empty parade of his washing their feet. It goes in as part of the annual pageant. The "successor of Simon Peter" proceeds, with much display of golden and silver fringed napkin, to abase himself unto this lowliest of duties in a quite superfluous ablution. It is a queer spectacle; for the invitations are of the selectest sort, and the guests are of the proudest ranks, while His Holiness is displaying his humility in this mimicry of Jesus. Such a condescension is nothing but superciliousness, when one so carefully leaves out the "one another." It does not even need the shrewdness of pious Bengel to exclaim, "It would be more to be wondered at if, in true humility, he should wash the feet of one *king* than of twelve *paupers*!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### *WASHING ONE ANOTHER'S FEET.*

“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.” — JOHN xiii. 14.

A MODERN traveller has related that at the Hofberg, the principal palace of the Austrian Emperor, a ceremony took place on Good Friday, which has probably no parallel throughout all the states of Europe. It is an old and familiar event known as the “Green Thursday Feet Washing.” It took place as usual, in the splendid “Hall of Ceremonies.” On each side of the great chamber was a table, each of twelve covers, one for as many aged men, the other for as many aged women. The palace was filled with dignitaries, including the Ministers, the Corps Diplomatique, and various court officials. At half-past ten o'clock these chosen people, having received the Sacrament in the Court Chapel, were brought to their seats at the tables. They were all dressed in the old German costume, the dresses being presented by the Emperor. At eleven o'clock the clergymen conducting the cere-



mony appeared. They were followed by the Emperor, the Empress, the Crown Princess, the Archdukes, and the Archduchesses. The Emperor served the men, who take the food home after the ceremony, while the Empress and the Crown Princess Stephanie, and the Archduchesses served the women in their several places. The characteristic part of the performance was the taking off a shoe and stocking from one foot of each of these strange guests, after which the Emperor and Empress wiped their feet with towels moistened from a golden ewer. After this their Majesties hung a purse, containing thirty pieces of silver, round the neck of each of the twenty-four. At the conclusion of the ceremony the latter were sent home in court carriages, each with a basket of provisions.

Now what is it possible that this evidently religious exhibition could mean? We are told that in many quarters it is claimed that the words of our Saviour, as remembered and recorded by the evangelist John, ought to be understood as instituting a fresh ordinance in the New Testament quite as fixedly and peremptorily as his previous words had instituted the Lord's Supper. A strict and literal construction of his address to his disciples would make it a formal command. "So when he had washed their feet, and taken his garments and sat down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me, Master, and Lord:

and ye say well: for so I am. If I then the Lord and the Master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet."

Surely, nowhere within the bounds of the Protestant church in Christendom could there be tolerated a custom so singular, founded upon an interpretation so mistaken. The language of Jesus has in its terms no form of expression which appears mandatory. He says he gives an "example," not an ordinance. "For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you." There is no hint of an ecclesiastical memorial here. No subsequent utterance claims that an observance was to be handed down to "show the Lord's" humility "till he come."

The proofs of this are very simple and direct. The disciples themselves did not so receive or observe it. The primitive Christians did not introduce it into any of the forms of practice or order of the early church. There is in history no trace of it till in the fourth century after Christ. The suggestions here are spiritual in their force. The followers of our Lord had more than once been quarrelling for place, contending who should be considered greatest. He takes this last opportunity to teach them in a way they would never forget, that *he* would be greatest who made himself *least*. And so the precept would be obeyed, not by any ostentatious and literal ablution of each other's persons, but in the

wider sense by seeking each other's forwardness, and furthering each other's interests, in matters of reputation and experience. And moreover, a spiritual reference is intended, as to the help we can be to others in guarding against and correcting their besetting sins. If our divine Master does the one great bathing of regeneration for us, we may well try to assist in the washing from transient sinfulness for each other. If we discover infirmities, we may seek to be of help in the healing.

But we are more concerned in our present study with the part taken and received by the disciple Peter. His behaviour is not altogether satisfactory, and yet his acquisitions of doctrine must have been large. We resume the exposition of the narrative where we left it off before.

The strange work moved on; so far as we can discover Jesus proceeded in the hush of a profound silence. The artists have always found this a favourite scene for their pencils. Only Fra Angelico, however, has seemed to satisfy the idealism of devout critics. There are but four figures in his painting, and the entire details as to attitude at the table are faulty. But the meaning of the incident is given with wonderful force and delicacy of expression. The words of the gifted authoress of the "History of our Lord as exemplified in Works of Art" are singularly suggestive: "Not only the hands, but the feet of poor shocked Peter protest

against his Master's condescension. It is a contest for humility between the two; but our Lord is more than humble, he is lowly and mighty too. He is on his knees; but his two outstretched hands, so lovingly offered, begging to be accepted, go beyond the mere incident, as Art and Poetry of this class always do, and link themselves typically with the whole gracious scheme of redemption. True Christian Art, even if Theology were silent, would, like the very stones, cry out, and proclaim how every act of our Lord's course refers to one supreme idea."

"So he cometh to Simon Peter. He saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" The word "wash" used here is a fresh word, not found in the narrative before; it means bathed—that is, it has in it more the notion of refreshment than of cleansing. John's feet, it may be, were bathed first; he was close by his Lord; then James', or Matthew's, or Andrew's. At length came Peter in the order of the places. Of course, we look on eagerly, for we have learned to expect some sort of demonstration. This unusual service was one of the things which, in such a man's opinion, could not be suffered unquestioned to go on.

"Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" The emphasis here falls, not on the "my," but upon the "thou." The collocation of the terms in the Greek is unusual, abrupt, and explosive: "Thou—my feet—dost wash!" To such a disciple as Peter there was a

world of separation between those two pronouns. He recoiled with an unutterable sense of shame, and spoke as if his face burned with astonishment, when he interjected this refusal.

Then Jesus started to hush him, and to soothe his excited feeling with a promise of subsequent explanation. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter." Still, this seems not to have satisfied the old fisherman from Bethsaida. He imagined he knew the proprieties in the case thoroughly. Jesus approached him again with the basin and towel; Peter actually sprang back from the touch with more violence than before, exclaiming with an extravagance of rejection almost unparalleled: "Thou shalt never—not to all eternity—wash my feet!" It may have been his reverence which caused his reluctance; but he was wholly wrong in his vehemence. One may pardon the burst of emotion, for the occasion was a surprise; but when the Lord engaged to make all clear by and by, the boisterous resistance was without apology. Even a Christian may take a dangerous stand simply under an undue stress of right feeling.

Chrysostom, the old preacher, says it seems as if he might have seen in those delicate fingers around the napkin all Jesus' miracles. Could he say *No* to the hands that opened eyes, and cleansed lepers, and raised the dead? It was time to bring this wilful disciple to terms. Reverence in sentiment was all

right, but subordination in duty was supreme. "Obedience is better than sacrifice."

"Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." How these words of calm and terrible rebuke must have humbled and even alarmed Simon! For he knew their whole significance. To a Jew the word here rendered "part" was technical; for each Israelite was taught to connect it with the history of Canaan as the Land of Promise. A portion of that territory was marked off for each tribe; to lose one's "part" was to go homeless as an alien through life. And Canaan was a type of heaven. Hence such a warning must have frightened the excited man. This service offered might be a marvellous mystery of condescension, the acceptance of it might shock his sense of respect; but submission to his Master's will was everything. If he would not consent to yield himself implicitly and trustfully to the Christ of God, then his whole piety was no more than a name. On this issue, therefore, the impulsive but loving man surrendered at once. Nay, more: he rushed, as usual, to the opposite extreme; with superfluous acquiescence, he asked to be bathed all over: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"

The calm rejoinder he received must have let in upon Simon's mind the entire meaning of the conversation in which he had borne his share. "Jesus saith to him, He that is bathed needeth not save

to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." We ourselves are thus compelled to understand that reference is intended here to internal purity resulting from spiritual washing. If Jesus designed his teaching in the outset to bear upon the spirit of humility and to rebuke self-seeking among his followers, he evidently now pushes his admonition far forward into the regions of gospel doctrine. The great themes of evangelical grace come into consideration.

For example, *justification by the atonement* is suggested. The first work wrought upon a sinner's soul is the complete deliverance of it from the curse of the divine law. Then the Holy Spirit applies to its need the washing of regeneration, and the man's whole nature is cleansed from the corruption of sin. He is indeed "clean every whit" from the record and the ruin of a bad past. For the future, henceforth and thereafter, there needs to be performed in persistent sanctification only the necessary purifying from the actual transgressions into which one may fall, through temptation, betrayal, or surprise. The simple sense of what Jesus told Peter might be paraphrased in this way: "He, who has been bathed in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, requires after that only a fresh application of the same cool-flowing stream for whatever inadvertence renders him again culpable before an infinitely pure God." That this disciple learned his lesson well is plain from what he said himself, many years afterwards,

when he exhorted the believers, to whom he wrote his epistle, to remember that they had been "purged from their old sins."

In close connection with this, therefore, Simon received a fresh counsel concerning the doctrine of *the saints' perseverance*. Such work as this, when the Surety does it, is for ever sure. If it be begun, it will be carried on to complete sanctification and ultimate glory. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

But it is better to leave the entire force of this story to make its primary impression. When, afterwards, Jesus had finished his task, relinquished his basin and towel, and resumed the garment he had laid aside, he took up the real theme of his admonition. He told those disciples that they must do as he had been doing in all their coming work of winning souls to him. They must be willing to stoop to conquer. They would have to be all things to all men that they might save some. They must bend to any form of service in order to lift men. The question was not concerning pre-eminence, but concerning usefulness.

Simon Peter went forth from that interview seeing plainly that Christians must not be fastidious as to methods, nor supercilious in spirit. For men look for love in their desperate need. One of the best judges England ever knew, while in the midst of



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charging a jury, fell back dead on the bench. Then everybody remembered that the last words he uttered in the court-room were these: "What is wanted now to keep the bursting bonds of society together is not so much *help* as it is *sympathy!*"

"Oh, what a world of beauty a loving heart might plan  
If man but did his duty, and helped his brother man!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### *THE SIFTING PROCESS BEGUN.*

"And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." — LUKE xxii. 31.

IN the account given us by another evangelist we are told that a deep-laid plan was gathering its toils around the little company Jesus had chosen. Satan desired to "have" them that he might "sift" them as wheat. He does not claim that he will secure every one of the number, but he is going to test and know whether any one can be made to yield. The sifting process has now commenced, and the story before us is full of thrilling interest. Two disciples are especially under attack; but it is the entire and collective band of the twelve that our Lord warns of the coming peril, and not any one or any two he sees among them.

The figure employed here is as simple as it is graphic. Dean Alford's rendering of the whole clause is this: "Satan hath prevailed to have you all, that he may sift you as wheat." Doddridge paraphrases a portion of the verse for an explana-

tion: "tossed up and down and sifted like wheat in a sieve." It does not constitute a bright rhetorical picture to conceive of sifting an individual; the action requires many individuals, — a collective number out of which the smallest or wickedest might be driven away, leaving the rest to be preserved and safe.

Almost all modern commentators are interested to quote the lines of Longfellow, which he has called "A Folk Song," and specifically entitled "The Sifting of Peter." It is worth our while always to ascertain what the best poets say concerning the admonitions of Jesus quite as much as it is to find out what the best artists paint concerning an incident in his life. The "Folk Song" of our great singer reads thus: —

" In St. Luke's Gospel we are told  
How Peter in the days of old  
Was sifted;  
And now, though ages intervene,  
Sin is the same, while time and scene  
Are shifted.

" Satan desires us, great and small,  
As wheat, to sift us, and we all  
Are tempted;  
Not one, however rich or great,  
Is by his station or estate  
Exempted.

" No house so safely guarded is  
But he, by some device of his,  
Can enter;  
No heart hath armour so complete  
But he can pierce with arrows fleet  
Its centre.

" For all at last the cock will crow  
Who hear the warning voice, but go  
Unheeding,  
Till thrice and more they have denied  
The Man of Sorrows, crucified  
And bleeding.

" One look of that pale suffering face  
Will make us feel the deep disgrace  
Of weakness;  
We shall be sifted till the strength  
Of self-conceit be changed at length  
To meekness.

" Wounds of the soul, though healed, will ache;  
The reddening scars remain, and make  
Confession;  
Lost innocence returns no more;  
We are not what we were before  
Transgression.

" But noble souls, through dust and heat,  
Rise from disaster and defeat  
The stronger,  
And conscious still of the divine  
Within them, lie on earth supine  
No longer."

This might well be read and committed as a psalm of life, for in the quaint versicles are lodged many excellent admonitions. But in an exposition like ours we have to insist on literal fact, more especially when the lessons are in nowise weakened by the absolute truth. All of the twelve were sifted, Simon among them; Judas alone fell through.

We need not linger long on the experience of Judas. Our Lord abruptly discloses the crime

which was already fixed in the heart of a traitor like him; then he makes the treacherous creature understand he is acquainted with his purpose, and bids him go about his wicked business at once. One little touch of rhetoric gives us the turn of forcible expression which we need: Judas went out, "and it was night."

It was night in Jerusalem. Only the pale shining of the full Passover moon lit the street, into which the false-minded miser disappeared. The sun had gone down, the city lay still in the midst of the breathing multitudes encamped around the walls. The sieve had already been shaken, and the small soul of Judas had dropped through out of an honourable recognition for ever into the shadows of treason and spite.

It was night in his heart. For Satan, the prince of darkness in person, was ruling there. It was he that put this vile thought into the soul of Judas; he did it away back in that remembered hour when this money-loving treasurer who carried the bag became avaricious, and thought it would have been better business to sell the box of ointment and give him the cash to keep, rather than break it on the head of Jesus. It was "from that time he sought opportunity to betray him." An implacable feeling of bitterness had filled his mind ever since. Over him came a wave of the "outer darkness" like a cloud from the pit. We shall see that despair was just at hand, and suicide was coming soon.

It was night in all the vast future. Perhaps there is not in all the Bible a form of expression more simple and yet more suggestive than that which tells us that this man, when he died, "went to his own place." No words are wasted on his destiny. That is any man's place, for which the man himself is fitted; character governs destiny. And a dark soul full of gloom, when it goes whence it shall not return, must just content itself with going "to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness." We see at this vanishing moment, that the man is lost while he is living, already in hell because the prince of hell is in his heart. And so this awful thought follows, — a soul can be damned even before it is dead.

But we dismiss this theme as unwholesome; and, leaving Judas' warning to its own fate, we take up that which the Lord afterward gave Simon Peter, as recorded here in the story. But we shall have to link with this the other narratives in the gospel history, especially those words in Luke's account to which allusion has already been made.

Here was a warning given to this disciple by his truest friend. It is not to be forgotten that Peter reckoned himself always as at the very front in his loyalty of attachment to his Lord. As John has been called "the beloved disciple," so he has been

named "the loving disciple." He once went so far as to summon Omniscience as a witness: "Thou knowest all things, and thou knowest that I love thee." This man knew in his heart that Jesus Christ was to him the most faithful counsellor, the most gentle and kind adviser, he had in the whole world. It seems to us impossible that he should disregard what such a friend said that day. But we have sorrowfully to own that we have been warned by Jesus in his Word and by his Spirit, and have forgotten it just like Simon.

This was a warning couched in the tenderest terms. "Satan hath desired to have you," said the Lord Jesus, "but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." He used the plural *you* when he began, when he turns the sentence he uses the singular *thee*. "As Peter was often the mouth of the disciples," writes Matthew Henry, "so here he is made the ear." And yet there is a special approach to him in this address. Christ intimates that there would be occasion before long for him particularly to be "converted." What wonderful help there would be to an exposed man in the thought that his divine Lord was actually bearing a soul like his up to the mercy-seat! When we read the last account the evangelist gives of this first Lord's Supper, we learn that what Jesus said he was doing for Simon he is for ever doing in behalf of us all in our need. Think always of Jesus now interceding. History

records for our warning that Lentulus, the conspirator, sealed the treacherous epistle which he sent to the Allobroges with a signet whereon was engraved the head of his grandfather, a hero remarkable for his love of country and home. "How was it possible," exclaimed Cicero in his arraignment, "that the sight of this venerable face did not prevent you at the desperate moment when you were about to make it the instrument of crime?" Ah, this recollection of Jesus praying for us, — this would have loftier power to restrain us from wrong than any memory of ancestral pride!

It was a warning invited by Peter's own conceit. He had already gone out of his way to make a quite superfluous boast of his strength. "Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." He wanted to set out at once for martyrdom in Jesus' behalf! If every one else should desert him, Simon was going to stay! Oh, how little a human soul knows its own folly! "Two



leaks would drown any ship: " the great jurist, Lord Coke, said that. All of us have at least one of them in our souls. You may read in a medical book in common use the admonitory sentence: "Those diseases, which upon their first seizure always have been cured without any great danger, after a relapse have threatened death." We ought to know that in every man there is one weak exposure. Schoolboys are wont to read in their mythologies that when Achilles was dipped by his mother in the river Lethe in order to render him invulnerable, his heel alone of the whole body was left unsubmerged, for she held him by that as she plunged him underneath the current. So when he departed to the siege of Troy, and fought, like the warrior he was, through the continued campaigns, the Greek minstrels sang that such a chieftain could never die; but one day a poisoned arrow hit him in the heel, his single weak point, and he fell to fight no more.

It was a warning exhibiting to Peter a remediless downfall. The Egyptian priests are accustomed to assert that one single touch of the wing of a holy bird can charm a crocodile into torpor. It was not many days before this disciple discovered that not even the touch of his Lord's generous warning could subdue the devilish reptile of his vanity that lay coiled in his heart. One taunt of a servant girl made him curse and swear to a lie in denial. But he learned his lesson at last concerning the wiles of

Satan, who had "desired" him; it is Peter's expression we so often quote; he tells us of the devil "as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." Why do we forget his counsels in the very moment when we are finding fault with him for failing to remember his Master's? Chrysostom once cried out before his hearers: "O ye men who listen! God has given every one two eyes, because, if he loses one of them, he has another; but God has given none more than one soul!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### *"OVER THE BROOK CEDRON."*

"When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples."—JOHN xviii. 1.

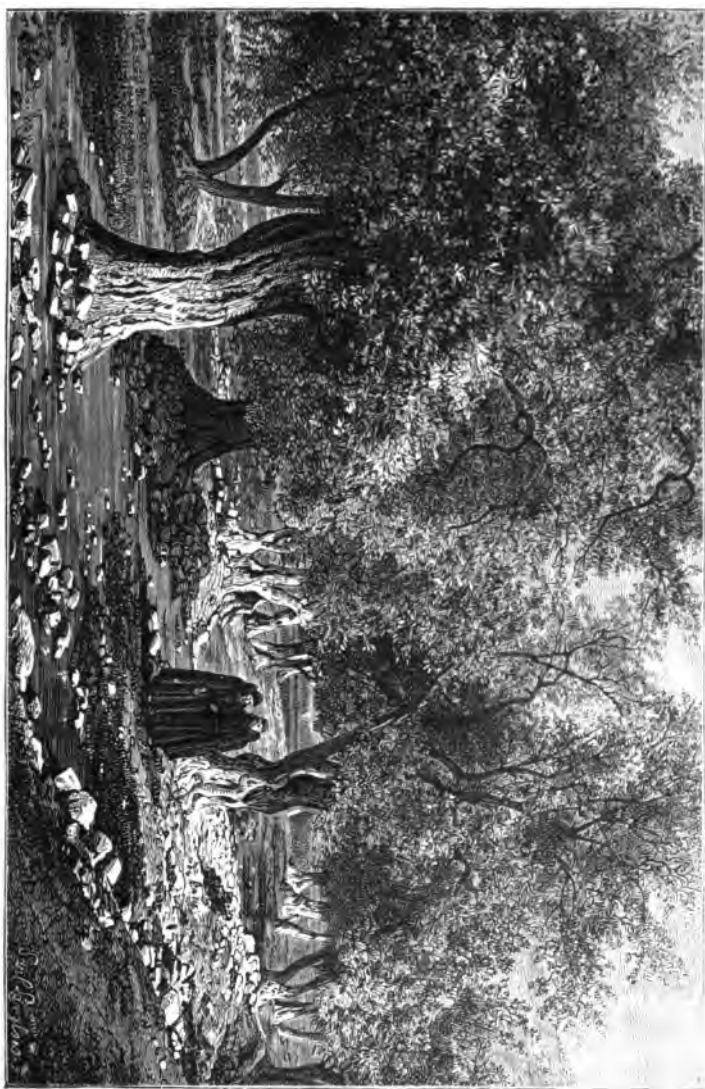
HERE in the words of our text we have a tremendous question settled by the simple crossing of a stream in the midnight. A great, solemn act that moved the world was done, when Jesus of Nazareth with his disciples "went over the brook Cedron" into Gethsemane garden. Thereafter for him was never one moment's rest or peace more in this world. His final touch on any soil of freedom was down there by the margin of that small stream running between Jerusalem and Mount Olivet. It will arrest our imagination to think of the strip of land which holds in an unalterable record the transit of our divine Lord across from the room where the Last Supper was celebrated to the garden of betrayal, among whose shadows he met the traitor face to face, and was borne to death.

The mere form of spelling the name in this instance is worthy of a notice. In all other cases it appears as Kidron; here it is Cedron. One of our children's hymns used to commence with this pathetic verse: —

"Beyond where Cedron's waters flow,  
Behold the suffering Saviour go,  
To sad Gethsemane."

It is said that this orthographic fashion of the word was offered as a rendering of an old interpretation of its meaning, "The Torrent of the Cedars." Some insist that both names were in use at the time, the Hebrew having given birth to one in the Greek resembling it in sound. A notion of dark colour is in each, though from different reasons. For a gloomy green, such as shadows of cedars would cast, might be very like a black hue in the water such as snow meltings would produce. And the term *brook* means a "winter-torrent," in whichever language employed.

Perhaps there is no one thing concerning which the popular imagination in our land considers itself more fixed or more satisfied, than concerning this natural feature of Jerusalem. Some of us have in days gone by been asked repeatedly, after returning from Palestine, as to the appearance of this stream in the valley. Sure we may be that a correction about this is actually needed among the best of peo-



OLIVE TREES IN THE KIDRON VALLEY, JERUSALEM.



ple. It is not likely that there ever was anything that could be called by the name of brook; there certainly is nothing of the sort now.

Between two somewhat extensive slopes lies a mere gully. If the rain falls heavily, as it often does in the height of the wet seasons, then it is possible that water might find its way down the steep hillside as into a natural gutter, and there would be created an insignificant storm brook, a mere rivulet such as we sometimes see in New England by the margin of the road after an excessive shower. The government engineers have shown by their excavations that the original channel used to lie much farther west than now, nearer the city walls, and was far deeper at the bottom. But I am not aware that any one has ever suggested the possible position of a fixed fountain or spring, that might permanently supply what would answer for a continual flowing.

Moreover, there is a mistranslation in the version of Scripture we are accustomed to read. The word *Kidron* means "turbid" or "black," and doubtless this refers to the peculiar character or colour of the actual current when there was any, and marks the mere muddy affluence of some kind of rainfall. In one instance our translators have put in the adjunct "brook" bodily, with no explanation. In general, it might be insisted that, whenever the name occurs, it would be just as accurately, and rather more felicitously, given as a ravine or valley, a waterless de-

pression between the two sharp slopes of Moriah and Olivet opposite.

I suppose, however, that the lines of the so-called hymn some of the churches have been in the habit of singing have done as much as anything else to pervert the popular understanding of the neighbourhood : —

"Thou sweet-gliding Kidron, by thy silver stream,  
Our Saviour at midnight, when moonlight's pale beam  
Shone bright on thy waters, would frequently stray,  
And lose in thy murmurs the toils of the day!"

And then although Nathaniel P. Willis has never been accepted as an authority in religious matters, there was always the poem of his we used to declaim at school, containing among others these descriptions:

" . . . and Kidron's stream  
Lacing the meadows with its silver band,  
And wreathing its mist mantle on the sky  
With the morn's exhalations."

When did we ever hear of any such notion as this in the Bible or in any proper book of geography? Yet here perhaps the idea originated of a constant and picturesque streamlet, just in the suburbs of Jerusalem, to which our Lord, in his wakeful nights or weary days, might be imagined to retire for moody meditation. The "moonlight's pale beam," as the poet phrases it, was the only true feature to us in all the description; and missionaries, long resi-



dent in the vicinity, have given assurance that they never knew of any water running there at all.

One suggestion, however, has been made, which is in some measure significant: possibly in the times when the full temple service was in employ, this ravine became the general outlet for the blood and refuse of the extensive sacrifices, and then it may have been necessary for a current of water to be conducted through it from another source in order to keep it cleansed ; if this were so, there may have been formerly a rivulet, dark and turbid, running from the point nearly opposite the eastern gate of the city down beyond Bethlehem and so to the Dead Sea.

Now the main thought of interest in this discussion is not merely topographical or scientific. Down from that little group of buildings standing upon the ridge of Mount Zion, near the so-called Tomb of David, came Jesus with his disciples on the night of his betrayal just at the conclusion of his intercessory prayer; along this steep path he walked, conversing with them; here he warned Simon Peter and promised a prayer in his behalf; here he told them how the Shepherd should before long be smitten and the sheep be scattered. Every step of the transit seems sacred; the very soil holds a sentiment in it. And we dwell the longer on the site because, undoubtedly, it is one of the most authentic of the gospel localities in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. That small stone

bridge, still keeping its place in the ordinary thoroughfare, is a landmark which was once rendered as historic in the Old Testament as it is now in the New. King David, when driven from his capital by his traitorous son Absalom, led his sorrowful train of nobles precisely as Jesus, the second David, led his train of disciples "over the brook Kidron," and sat there uncovered on the same hill in the midnight. There must be significance in a spot wet by the tears of Jesus falling where David's tears fell in a similar betrayal a thousand years before.

Some few suggestions of religious bearing may be made, while our minds are engaged with such a study as this. In all one's visits to a historic land like Palestine there is an appeal to the powerful law of association. And in such instances there is an argument of the subtle kind that has all the more cogency because it moves so imperceptibly.

History has recorded the importance of Cæsar's final decision, when he passed the little stream which bordered the territory he invaded; he made the very name of it immortal, and "passing the Rubicon" is now a proverb. Jesus crossing this brook Cedron arrests imagination. This age of ours can hardly be considered heroic, but it sometimes has a measure of admiration for heroes; it often praises a real service of sacrifice, when the praise costs nothing; and there are a few individuals here and there who feel the sublimity of strength under

suffering when a conspicuous instance like this passes before them. There is an unmistakable dramatic force in a crisis; the word means “a hinge,” and when vast interests turn on a single simple decision made in an unheralded stroke of the clock, out of sight, out of notice, that awful moment seems to grow majestic, like the moment of a soul’s coronation.

When Jesus went “over the brook Cedron,” he went straight on unto death. Just the other side of that line lay two gardens, in one of which were a devil and a traitor, in the other of which was a grave; a necessity was laid upon him that he should test the bitterness of both gardens on his way to his Father. No Christian will ever stand beside this ragged ravine unmoved; for there our Lord left his record upon an unalterable rock as if graven with a pen of iron for ever. Let us look at the peculiarities of this decision on which his life then turned.

First, remember that he went “over the brook Cedron” *in the midnight and alone*. To be sure, the disciples were with him; but he never was any the less alone for all that; they did not share his purpose or even understand it; he always trod the wine-press alone. Sooner or later, every one who helps this race of ours must cross a Cedron brook with a Gethsemane garden beyond it; and this he will likely have to do in the midnight and unattended, in the soberness of a secret unshared.

Next remember that he went "over the brook Cedron" *under pressure of a profound and intelligent conviction*. He once told his disciples, "I know whence I came, and whither I go." His life was fashioned upon a purpose. This is always essential to great achievement. An aged captain once said, "Where I could not be honest, I was never valiant." No man can ever do a worthy deed who has not a conviction bestowed on him by his God. It must be to him his "heavenly vision."

Remember, also, that Jesus went "over the brook Cedron" *directly after importunate prayer*. No supplication ever left human lips so intense as that final intercession of our Lord: "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee." He was at the moment going straight to his Father. Through the garden, into the judgment hall, out upon Calvary, down beneath the great stone into the grave, up into the light, aloft from the mountain into the sky, out of sight, — he kept going to his Father. And it was the prayer that lifted him; and he kept praying, and he is praying now at his right hand.

Finally, remember that he went "over the brook Cedron" *in an unwavering courage and an unfaltering trust*. Why should he fear after a self-surrender so complete? It was his Father's responsibility for an anxious hour of peril and pain; no longer his own any more. Not fifty days after this midnight, priests

were frightened, Judas burst asunder and dead, Roman guards prostrate, Satan baffled, the grave rended, the earth trembling, the skies parted, heaven ringing with triumph because of the Prince returned to his Father's love, and shining with glory!

O ye, who pause frightened and irresolute upon the brink of your Cedron of midnight duty, afraid to pass the slender stream of decision because the step leads to some Gethsemane of possible suffering, think of this Lord of ours in his dauntless decision! "*Via crucis, via lucis!*" The way of the cross is the way into light. The call of duty is unyielding; but the reward of duty is reached when he, who went "over the brook Cedron" that night, says to you and me, "Well done!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### *FALLING ASLEEP IN THE GARDEN.*

“And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?”—  
MATTHEW xxvi. 40.

EVERY night but one of the closing week of his life, our Lord went at evening quite over the mount of Olives, to the little village of Bethany. In the humble home of Martha and Mary he found all the shelter so poor a town had to offer.

But on this one, the last night he spent before the crucifixion, he remained within the proper precincts of the city. The reason was commonplace; but it certainly shows most suggestively that, down to the final moment, Christ intended to fulfil every righteous requisition of the old dispensation, even in founding the new. There was an enactment of Jewish law which made it needful for every true Israelite to spend these Passover hours in Jerusalem itself. That was what the people came up for,—that they might celebrate the feast in the holy city. So Jesus remained within the limits, and only went forth to a near retreat.

Perhaps there is no other spot on this entire planet so interesting as Gethsemane, both for what it conceals and what it discloses. Wonderfully much do we learn here of Jesus Christ. Wonderfully much more, however, do we learn that we cannot now understand. The passion is set before us in all its majesty and mystery.

When our Lord left the upper room, where he had been celebrating the feast, he began a conversation with his disciples of the deepest interest. Their attention must all the time have been arrested. And whether they knew or cared to know where he was going, is not told us. He had taken them often, however, out to this garden. He now led them around the slope of the hill, across the ravine of the Kidron, and there, just at the depth of the valley, as the ground begins to rise, he reached the spot where the most pathetic stresses of his agony were to be endured.

We are learning in these days that the "Land" and the "Book" are inseparable companions in the study of one who tries to follow Christ.

The doubt which attacks any doctrine of Christianity is dissipated the most easily by positive impressions concerning Christ. Into the entire scheme of faith he came to establish, his personal life evidently was interjected. Jesus Christ was Christianity. Now when this personal life is crossed, it carries conviction of truth with it. You walked

down that rugged declivity, you passed over the Kidron, you saw the olives in Gethsemane garden. You are certainly on the road across to Bethany, and yonder is Mount Zion. A firm conviction, an ineffable sense of comfort, is lodged in your heart. Every misgiving is silenced, the whole soul is at rest: "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." You will recollect that it was on this exact spot, this crossing point "over the brook Cedron," where our Saviour exclaimed, when the priests demanded that he should silence the children singing hosannas, "I tell you, if they should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." As one moves over that country, he finds the grave of Rachel in the valley, the well of Jacob in the plain, the town of Lazarus on the hill; and he knows that here close by Immanuel once walked and lived, a man like himself. The very localities testify, and the mind rests.

Then put with this a new lesson: see how wonderful is the illustration offered here of the truth of what Jesus said about his words.

Upon this very track also, Jesus told Simon Peter that heaven and earth should pass away, but his "words" should never pass away. And a great flood of years has poured along in the stream of time since such strange prophecy fell on their ears; now where are we? Jerusalem lies in heaps; the Roman conquerors are all dead and the empire has vanished; the Jewish nation is scattered and peeled; Kidron is



dried up like a refuse potsherd. But the words of the Galilean peasant who went to his crucifixion that night have swept round and round the world; they are living to-day, and more alive than ever. They will stand when the trumpets sound, and the stars fall, and the sky is scrolled in fire.

The story begins again with the conclusion of the long discourse delivered up on the hillside; apparently most of those who followed in the company have fallen off as the evening drew on into the night; only the disciples, and perhaps not all of them, remain. At all events, Jesus selects three persons, John, James, and Peter, to go down the familiar path leading to his wonted place of prayer, the Gethsemane garden. These chosen three out of a chosen twelve had been honored twice before by the same show of preference; namely, at the transfiguration, and at the raising of Jairus' daughter. They now find themselves summoned into the very Holy of Holies, so to speak, of his mortal agony.

As soon as the small company reach their destination, the disciples are bidden to pause by themselves, while Jesus goes on a little further forward into the shadows of the olive-trees to pray alone. There occurs the sweat of blood, the terrible wrestle in his soul with those reluctances and longings concerning what he calls the "cup" which, for some vast and mysterious reason, it did not seem to him he could possibly drink. The scene grows weird and oppres-

sive as we now recall it. Backwards and forwards goes that suffering man, all his humanity wistfully crying out for sympathy; three times he falls upon his knees and wets the sward of Mount Olivet with his blood. During this season, as his form moves to and fro among the shadows, those three friends throw themselves down on the bank, and positively go to sleep! We are given in the epistle to the Hebrews a hint of the depth of Jesus' suffering; this Redeemer of ours was pleading "with strong crying and tears." We know that braver man never breathed on this earth; but now he is thoroughly subdued. He returns to his disciples for a word of affection.

For some reason or other, Jesus addresses "Simon," son of Jonas, as if he were, as usual, the ringleader in this disappointment: "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?" This explosive word "What!" employed in such a connection in our English version is exquisitely idiomatic; it signifies surprise, astonishment, pain, reproof. Matthew's gospel says "ye" in the plural, as if Jesus meant them all at once; it is different in Mark's gospel, which Peter was responsible for; there a direct, second-person-singular pronoun is used, and the old name is in the address: "Simon, sleepest *thou*? couldst not *thou* watch one hour?" It would seem as if he had expected more consideration from a man that he had done so much for — more thoughtfulness, more constancy.

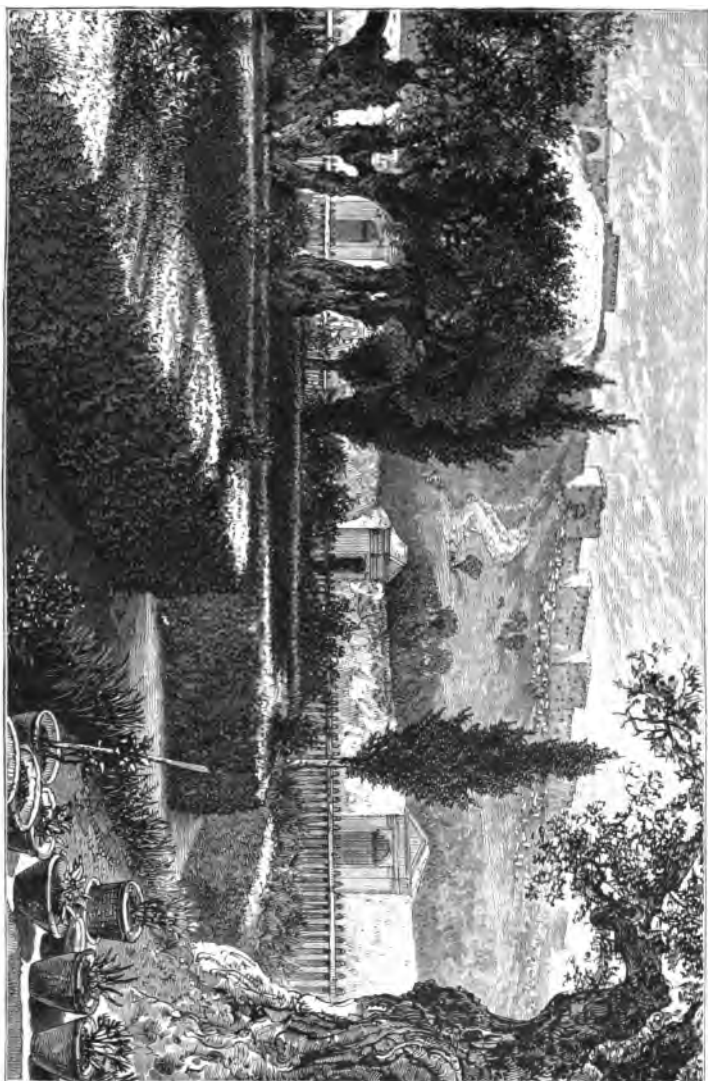
But they were all in this wrong, however far the guilt extended. Jesus went away again, and prayed the same prayer; then he returned to these drowsy disciples once more, and found them so "heavy with sleep" that they could not talk intelligently. Then he went off into the silent shadows as before, prayed the same prayer, and came to them yet a third time and found them dead asleep as ever; then it was Jesus said, in tones of gentlest consideration, "Sleep on now, and take your rest."

It is not necessary for us to press these sleeping men too heavily with blame for such seeming heartlessness. Think of the intensely exciting day through which they had passed; remember the lateness of a silent midnight under cool trees to a company of labouring men; consider the sadness and sorrow of their experience, the hopelessness of the future, and the melancholy of the past, when they tried to keep their open eyes from dropping shut in despite of their most strenuous endeavours. Call to mind also how pitifully Jesus talked to himself about so strange a failure; he knew they tried their best to help him. But his words were sent into history, just as they must have dropped down from his lips, full of sweet extenuation and apology: "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." That must be the meaning of the text in the third gospel; Luke was a physician, and he has given as a proper explanation of the fact: Jesus "found them sleeping for sorrow."

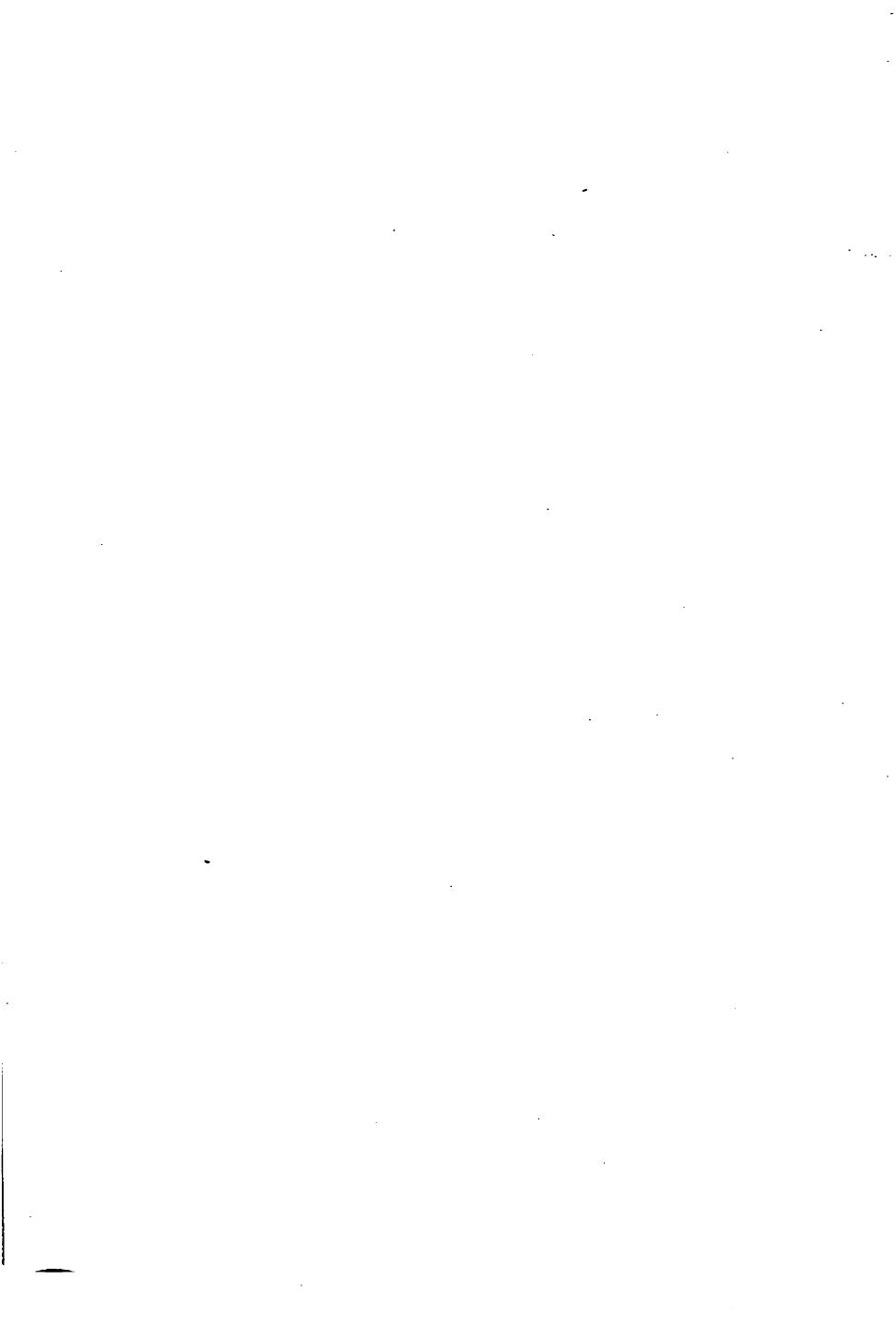
We cannot leave this garden of Gethsemane just now; there is another scene with the same actors in it to be considered. We will send our imaginations across two oceans, however, and visit the sacred spot as it appears to the student in modern times. Then when we are seated under the olive-trees we can think over what we have learned to-day.

Passing out of Jerusalem on the eastern side, you would find two paths, either of which would lead you across the hill to Bethany. Between them, upon the slope, just beyond the deep ravine of the Kidron, lies a low patch of land, claimed by the Russian church to be the true site of the old garden. To this there was anciently given a name signifying "olive-press"; such is the meaning of the word *Gethsemane*. It is possible that there may have been in this locality a public press — convenient for crushing olives or grapes for their juices. Christians of modern times have always seemed to think that the evangelic prophet Isaiah chose his figure from such an instrument when predicting the amazing grace and solitary sufferings of the Messiah: "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me."

The present enclosure is surrounded by a high white wall on every side, pierced at one point for an unwieldy iron door. It is kept by a miserable monk, whose garments are not clean, whose manners are repulsive, whose horticultural taste is preposter-



THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.



ous, and whose rapacious receptivity is simply indefinite. He assumes to conduct strangers to the sacred spots, and seems quite as anxious to hurry through his perfunctory task as they are to be finally rid of him.

The guide is wont first to lead people around on the outside of the wall, along a flagged way crossing one end of the garden. This they have distinguished by a most significant name, — the *terra damnata*, or the accursed spot: for it is intended to commemorate the betrayal. They declare that the flat pavement has been laid upon the exact track of Judas, as he advanced to salute his Master with the hypocritical kiss.

From this we go at once to the place where the disciples slumbered. And the guardians will even show you the dent in the rock Peter made as he sat down! At last we are introduced by the iron gate into the enclosure itself. At once the credulous creature conducts us to a grotto, in which the Saviour is said to have prayed. So we are pushed on from one enormity of exhibition to another, until, with every sensibility painfully outraged by the impostures, we are fain to dismiss the unwelcome keeper, and retire into the undefiled circle of our own reserve. In Gethsemane, of all places in the world, one cannot well bear to receive the droning rehearsals of ancient superstition and monkish fable.

Thus, then, we reach our one great lesson from this story. "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak:" these three disciples slept in just the same way on the mount of transfiguration, when their experience was at the highest; here it is at the lowest. Joy and grief at their supreme elevation and depth: and yet "the flesh is weak," and an invaluable chance is lost by simple dulness of sensibility! What are we therefore to do? Jesus has given us the answer to such a question: "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."



## CHAPTER X.

### *GRANDILOQUENCE WITH A SWORD.*

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus." — JOHN xviii. 10.

IT will be remembered that, when Jesus was celebrating the Last Supper, he warned his disciples of some fierce disasters coming soon. That prediction is preserved only by Luke. The whole passage is this: "And he said unto them, When I sent you forth without purse, and wallet, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. And he said unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise a wallet: and he that hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword. For I say unto you, that this which is written must be fulfilled in me, And he was reckoned with transgressors: for that which concerneth me hath fulfilment. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough."

Our Lord meant to have them prepare themselves for the conflict. He did say that each one must

get a purse for money, a wallet for food, shoes for travel, and a sword for defense. But his language was figurative, and he referred to the vast range of the future tribulation of the Church. Those disciples made two mistakes: they thought he wanted them to make ready for the troublous evening of that very day, and get weapons for some sort of fight which was now to come on. So they gave the ridiculous reply that they had secured "two swords" already. Then he added, "It is enough." He did not mean that these were sufficient, but that he had said enough in his admonition; so this was an instance of what Canon Farrar well describes as their "stolid literalness."

We come once more to Gethsemane; Jesus is apprehended; the traitor salutes Jesus with a kiss, the sign agreed upon with the soldiers: "Hail, Master!" "Then came they and laid hands on Jesus and took him."

Precisely there the historic curtain rises. First of all, enter Peter: abrupt, sudden, violent as the flashing of the weapon he holds, this disciple stands out before our eyes, and we positively have to await further developments before we can decide whether he has lost his senses or is in his behaviour more than usually absurd. For he commences a startling attack upon the company following the soldiers, choosing for his victim one, who perhaps

was the nearest man he could reach at the moment, and yet surely was a non-combatant; a household menial, whose surprise must have been as great as his pain under the slash of the sharp steel; for he doubtless counted himself to be altogether out of danger, having come in with the rest out of curiosity alone. Every evangelist gives the story: "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus."

Now the strangest thing here is, that we find ourselves admiring Peter's action in despite of our better judgment. Surely, we wish his stroke had been aimed at Judas instead, and better aimed also. For of all the villains in the world a traitor is the vilest and most execrable. Still, a thought like this shows our faulty estimate. Judas had now a most significant task to accomplish. Miserable wretch that this man was, he was yet in the line of prophecy remaining to be fulfilled. The Potter's Field must be bought with his money; it was needed that a reprobate like him should see his wickedness consummated, move on with the steps of his infamy, then slay himself—as he eventually did.

Three things characterize this action of Simon Peter, either one of which vitiates its value: it was arrogant, ignorant, and reckless.

Arrogant—for it was an inconsiderate assump-

tion upon his part that his Lord needed physical succour. Perhaps Peter remembered how it had been said of him he was to deny his Master; he had made reply that he would be the last man to do it. He now desired to make this saying good. No doubt his mind was agitated with some indefinite and confused remembrances of what Jesus had once told his disciples about buying swords even if they had to sell their outer garments to get the money. He rightly waited to ask, "Lord, shall we smite?" But he did not wait for the order: he smote. You may admire Simon Peter's promptness; but all this originated in simple presumption, forwardness, and melancholy mistake. His courage was the mere ebullition of a bravery that struck at a bystander and then ran — a mingling of folly and fugacity.

And next, his conduct was ignorant also. For this blow was aimed in reality at the entire plan of redemption. If Peter meant to accomplish anything, he meant to liberate Christ from arrest. If he had succeeded, how could this mission of our Redeemer have been fulfilled? If there should be no death of the Surety, there could be no sacrifice made for the sinner; then there would fail all hope of atonement; then the seed of the woman could never bruise the serpent's head. It is an amazing fact in Simon Peter's history that twice before he had forgotten such considerations, and been sting-

ingly rebuked for his officious sympathy and interference with divine purposes. Yet here he is again! "When they which were about him, saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"

So furthermore: this blow of Peter was reckless. For what could that little band of disciples hope to do? If they intended fight, two swords were too few; if they desired conciliation, one sword was quite too many. The assault which was made so rashly must have roused those soldiers into wrathful excitement. It was the majesty of the Master's calmness which threw them down to the ground backward. They were superstitious, and easily controlled through their fears. But this rough appeal to arms surrendered every advantage. Use of the sword was just in their line; it presumed that Jesus had nothing else to use but iron weapons. And that many a blade flashed back the torchlight, as these military men sprang to such a challenge, it needs

no effort to imagine. The entire Church on earth might have been swept out of existence in a swift instant of madness, but for the presence of its divine Head.

At once, therefore, our Lord interposed. Rebuke followed such a thoughtless attack. A noble figure now advances into view, and a calm voice speaks in the olive shadows; Jesus is able to drink his own cup. I cannot forbear even here a single word of admiration of the infinite thoughtfulness and undisturbed equanimity which could venture to offer instruction in a moment like this. Such a rebuke was not only a check, but a lesson. It presents now abundant food for our reflection.

To begin with, our Lord puts an end to any present interference. Peter must subside just where he is. The first church war ends. Then Jesus extends the principle by a wide application. He warns the disciples against using any worldly defenses for the Faith in future times. It was as if he meant simply to say to this over-zealous follower, "It is for me to submit, and for you to obey; put up thy sword; I have not the least use for helps of this sort; higher defenses are provided for me whenever I am compelled to draw upon them; all bloodshed is unavailing in spiritual conflicts; the weapons of our warfare are not carnal; the great natural law is, Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; let the sword stay where it belongs; the one

that draws it shall perish by it; the aid he invokes shall cut him to pieces."

Now would you believe that one of the most praised of all papal theologians professes to discover in the mere proverb which our Lord quotes, and by quoting inspires, a real sanction for the appeal to arms which the Roman hierarchy has more than once made for the extermination of heretics? How does he get it? Just this way: Jesus commands Peter to put up his sword, not to put it away! Hence he draws the inference that all popes who follow Peter (the first in the series) may wear the weapon of war, and are not forbidden to use it at proper times!

On the other hand, one of the most ancient commentators turns the expression into an argument against any military service for Christian people. Hence, he concludes, those who are loyal to the King of kings must never seek to prove their allegiance with the blast of a trumpet, or to advance the banner of truth with cannons' roar and drumbeats.

Both were palpably wrong, as extremists always are. Jesus passes on immediately to disclose the real resources of the gospel for its propagation. These are spiritual, supernatural, divine; he said there in the presence of Caiaphas and the Roman Empire, leagued together for his arrest, that he could have twelve legions of angels for his rescue on the instant if he chose to call them. Mount

Olivet should flash in the midnight with wings of silver and shields of gold, if he thought a need had arisen to summon their presence. He seemed to himself, while he talked so quietly to others, to be now standing out upon the plains of the universe, a picture for all coming time to contemplate, exhibiting the unseen hosts of the Lord of hosts, and laying down principles which were to comfort and to guide his disciples in the subsequent advancement of his kingdom upon the earth. The beautiful parallel which the Old Testament furnishes to this New Testament spectacle is found a thousand years back of this along the ages. You will remember the famous helpfulness of the prophet Elisha to his poor little servant boy, frightened almost out of his senses in the midst of the Syrian troops, coiled around the base of the hill where he stood. God's mighty seer, with a prayer and a swing of his hand, filled the mountain with horses and chariots of fire, and then opened the lad's eyes that he might behold the legions of God in the air! Then he whispered in his ear, "Do not fear; they that be with us are more than they that be with them!"

The instruction of this scene seems to grow as we study it. But, indeed, there is only one lesson to be learned. It is all in the plain contrast of the two persons standing there side by side. One is Jesus, and the other is Simon Peter. One is tranquil and sublime; the other infuriated and ridiculous. For



his defence one trusts the angels; the other, a bit of old iron. The one is the incarnation of eloquence with the truth; the other, of grandiloquence with a sword. The one teaches; the other swaggers. The one cuts off a man's ear; the other heals it. The one is a fisherman at war; the other is Immanuel, Prince of peace. The one submits and triumphs; the other resists and is defeated. Finally, the one takes a bitter cup, and drinks it; the other takes a deserved rebuff, and disappears. And so the voice which speaks to every believer whose feet enter Gethsemane now is found in the old war cry of Christ's militant Church: "Not by might, nor by power; but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### *A MIRACLE FOR MALCHUS.*

“And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.” — LUKE xxii. 51.

THE general details of this story have been before us for study. All the evangelists describe the attack made upon the serving-man, but only John mentions the name of Simon Peter, who wielded the sword, and he alone gives the name of Malchus, who suffered from the blow. It is likely that this evangelist, being an acquaintance of the high priest, and a frequenter of his palace, knew this attendant, and so remembered the whole scene with more vividness than the rest. The fact that Jesus is not said to have stooped to pick up the severed ear is enough to suggest at least that only a portion of it was smitten off; he had only to touch the spot where the wound was fresh. Moreover, Luke uses an infrequent word for ear, and the other writers employ a diminutive, as if perhaps it might have been the tip of the lobe that was struck. It makes no sort of difference, but it intimates that the passionate

disciple aimed to do murderous things when he brandished his weapon, Malchus saving himself worse losses by an adroit dodging of the danger.

We have seen with what gentleness our Lord quieted Simon with an earnest deprecation of all violence, and a counsel concerning true humility under injury, forbearance and submission before the events of a providence mysterious but irresistible. With what delicate tact he averted an infinite catastrophe by reminding his frightened friends how helpfully the angels of God were thronged around his Father's faithful servants! How serenely he told them that clear to his vision was just now an army of heavenly defenders, more strong and beautiful creatures with wings and weapons than ever Jacob at Mahanaim had for his succour, all drawn up in battle array, ready to advance with a word of command!

And then he told those trembling followers that this was not the way in which the world was going to be converted. Indeed, they had an entirely inadequate sense of the gospel if they imagined that he, Jesus, God's Anointed, was to be rescued from the crucifixion at hand that the infinite purpose of his Father had designed for him. All this, in these later times, strikes us so strangely! Surely there is nothing so surprising in all the round of Scripture history, as this inveterately recurring dulness of those erring men concerning the first principles of

the plan of salvation. They could not understand the vicarious nature, or the legal relation, of the necessary sufferings of their Lord and Master. The simple truth, so clear and yet so momentous as it now lies in our minds, they never appreciated till after the day of Pentecost, — the fact that men could be redeemed in no other way than by the awful humiliation and the actual death of the Son of God on the cross. Sinners cannot be saved unless a propitiation is made. Divine law has been broken, and the curse is on the race. These disciples learned the entire height and depth of that truth before long. Oh, how eloquently they lived afterwards to preach it, and courageously to die for it!

But instruction and rebuke needed now to yield a moment to rigid demands of prudence. To be smitten down there in Gethsemane by an exasperated band of heathen soldiers was not the plan of salvation as in God's wisdom it had been ordered. The third act in the drama of providence begins at this point: first, attack; second, rebuke; now a calm retrieval of the fortunes of the day. A grand exhibition of God's omnipotence startles the entire throng under those silent olives. Alone of the evangelists Luke mentions this miracle. He wrote professedly a little more in detail than the rest; and by occupation he was a physician, and seems to have borne this incident fixedly in his mind. When Peter struck his rash stroke, and before the military men

had time for a retorting blow to avenge it, our Lord "answered and said, Suffer ye thus far: and he touched his ear, and healed him." Several interpretations of these words have been proposed by the old expositors. Scott and Henry direct the remark toward the soldiers, as if Jesus would say to them deprecatingly, "Do not revenge this headlong zeal of one alone among my followers; he ran before he was sent in his attack upon Malchus, and I will help him forthwith for the hurt in his ear." Calvin is apparently under the impression that Jesus addressed the disciples instead of the soldiers, and with a touch of commiseration in his voice, as if he would say, "Bear this great insult to your Master; suffer the poor, mistaken people to reject and arrest their best friend; put up in patience and grace with these misguided servants of bigots; the man is not to blame; see, I will forgive and heal him." Clarke and Alford do not seem to attach much importance to the words spoken, treating them as if they were the expression of a mere polite phrase of courtesy, as if Jesus wished to say, "I regret this violence; let me repair the cut upon this man's head; suffer ye thus far." Our chief thought in reading the story is about the admirable and astonishing majesty of Jesus! How becoming and dignified his demeanour! How serene his calmness!

Concerning the miracle wrought we notice several particulars, in this instance positively unusual and extraordinary. For one thing, it was wrought on

an enemy. It is possible that Malchus was in high position at the palace, and capable of great mischief. It was not asked; no hint is given that this wounded servant implored any interposition. No prayer, so far as we can conjecture, was ever offered for his help. Nor did it find any answering faith in the recipient. Malchus was only a Jewish bigot like his master, so we suppose. He did not accept a grace upon a grace; he sent out no turning of his soul toward the Saviour, either for his soul or his body. The action of Jesus was simply sovereign, and performed out of love and mercy to an undeserving opponent. But the miracle was received without any thanks or any manifestation of generous feeling. We never hear of this man's coming around to our Lord with an acknowledgment of favour bestowed upon him, or with any profession of acceptance of his Godhead because of the astonishing wonder he had performed. The healing of that man's ear was absolutely indisputable; there could be no contradiction of so commonplace an experience. The cutting off of a living man's ear was unmistakable; the putting of it back again uninjured and unsore was a miracle without an intelligent basis of cavil. Everybody saw it; the scar would prove it afterward. Indeed, the most marvellous peculiarity of this miraculous transaction there in the garden of Gethsemane is found in the fact now made very clear that it produced apparently no

impression whatever; no one cried out, "What manner of man is this?" Not a convert was gained by it. Eventually it proved an essential awkwardness and discomfiture at the trial which our Lord was forced to undergo. For there were two persons to whom it might have been of immense value, each of whom felt embarrassed by it rather than aided. Both Peter and Caiaphas, the high priest, had, in the falsehoods and perjuries of those awful hours, succeeded in putting themselves in such an untenable position that it was impossible for them to use the advantage it might have brought to them, because it gave each the necessity of owning to a point-blank lie.

It will be remembered that after Simon Peter had come back from his hiding in the passage-way for an uncomfortable hour, and had drawn nearer the fire of coals once more, he was accosted by a man who had a question to ask: "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" Such an interrogatory put suddenly forced the startled disciple to look fairly in the face the man who could fix particulars; and he recognized immediately that his questioner was a kinsman of the servant whose ear the Lord had healed with his touch. Now, of course, the inference would be, under the circumstances, that here was a friend of Jesus Christ, and a witness of his divine power in the working of a miracle. Peter was in such necessity that this might have been of immeasurable value to him. For all he would have to

do would be to reply: "Yes, indeed; I am glad you recognize me, for you saw the Master, and you noted his gentle way of approaching your kinsman whom I in my folly wounded. And you could be sure of the miracle of healing, and so you would know that Jesus is the Messiah of our nation and the Christ of God!" But Peter forfeited the chance of such an appeal after he cried out, "I know not the man!" The question must have touched his emotional nature as it summoned the memories of the garden suffering into review; and this hardened him in his spirit with a rush of remorse; it maddened him till he was utterly desperate, and began to curse and swear worse than ever he did before.

Caiaphas, the high priest, had a very similar experience. He told the people that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy; that he was a fraud and a deceiver, who had boasted that if the temple were destroyed he could rebuild it in three days. He suborned false witnesses to prove everything that was alleged against him. He stood up with a show of mighty dignity and cried out, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God!" So eager was he to be possessed of testimony that would condemn his victim. Now it would be a prime fact to prove, that his followers were starting attacks on the Jewish priesthood as well as on the Roman government, that some of the disciples of this rabbi were malig-



nantly inclined; as, for instance, a fisherman from upper Galilee, who had positively made a murderous rush at one of the servants of the palace, and had cut off one of his ears. And this happened not two hours ago, just this very evening. What has anybody to do with such wretched and reckless fellows? But then: this would render it necessary to produce the man, and then he would exhibit his scar, and all the story of the miracle would come to light. If the incident proved anything, it would prove that Jesus was the Messiah the Jews were waiting for, and was, in person, the Son of the Highest. That was more than Caiaphas bargained for; more than he dared prove in the case. The evidence of the servant would show the master's lie.

Now it might be remarked in passing, as I go on rapidly to indicate the legitimate lessons of this narrative, that many most irrelevant and puerile interpretations have been foisted on the phrases which occur in the account. One of the ancient "fathers" thinks that Malchus, who was a servant of the high priest and so a Levite, was a type of the Jewish hierarchy, which thenceforward became slaves and lost their ear—their left ear, according to the ceremonial requisition of Moses, in the case of bondmen. The ear of the slave being bored through, while in this mutilation of Malchus the ear was quite struck off; and the slave being wounded in the left ear, while here it is mentioned as if such a fact ought to

be significant that Malchus was wounded in his right,—it is enough to say that the parallel is anything but perfect, and the analogy anything but intelligible! Another says, with somewhat similar acuteness, that this servant of the high priest was a representatively unfortunate figure of the entire nation, which from that day became in a manner judicially hardened and deaf—save a few, that by the extraordinarily magnanimous grace of Jehovah were afterward healed. All this is folly. But most of us would feel satisfied to accept Jesus here as the only real type, displaying the mercy of God in healing human woes.

In the first place, we may learn that violence is no way to gain a victory. When a wicked Shimei curses, the thing which seems now and then appropriate is to let Abishai go over and take off his head. No; better not. Soft answers are more Christian, and more effective also. Personal anger may easily be mistaken for zeal for God, but it never avails in the winning of souls. Jesus has to take back our mistakes.

Finally, we learn, above everything else in this story, that true self-renunciation is the chief, fullest, and last rule in the life the followers of our Lord are to live. Even our Saviour said here, “The cup that my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” Every cup is fixed in its size beforehand; it will hold only so much; it has a rim put around it by infinite wisdom; we must drink it as it comes to us.

## CHAPTER XII.

### *FOLLOWING CHRIST AFAR OFF.*

“And Peter followed him afar off, even unto the palace of the high priest.” — MARK xiv. 54.

THE story of which this verse forms a part is related by all of the four evangelists, as if they conceived it to be of the highest importance. One particular specially they agree in reporting: Simon Peter followed Jesus “afar off.” It may be well for us to read the narrative as it has been more lately rendered for us in the New Revision: “And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and there come together with him all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter had followed him afar off, even within, into the court of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers, and warming himself in the light of the fire.”

I. Let us inquire, in the outset, concerning the significance of this action of Simon. He was not wont to be backward in his service. Why was he noticeably laggard and distant in this critical instance?

1. The facts are very simple. When Christ retrieved the folly which this impetuous disciple had committed, and healed the ear of Malchus, it does not appear that the magnanimity of the Master had any effect in mitigating the malignity of the mob. They might not understand casuistical discussions of Jewish theology; but when a man drew a sword and made an attack, that was quite within their comprehension. No doubt they glowered with fierce looks upon that small band of disciples, as if they felt indignantly that, although they were not worth fighting, it was just as well they should be watched. Simon's stroke with his unusual weapon, instead of checking those belligerent people bearing swords and staves, came very near exasperating them. He simply put himself and his friends to flight, and then the crowd had it all their own way. It is a mournful record to read: "They all forsook him and fled." This left the ground clear; so Judas and his company completed their mission. "They that had laid hands on Jesus led him away."

But now, after this sudden and useless panic, it appears that at least two of our Lord's followers rallied their courage a little. They turned upon their flying footsteps, and started after the melancholy train. These were Peter and John. And the whole force of the dramatic incident we are studying is disclosed in the contrast of their behaviour. John ran with a will. As in the race afterwards for Christ's

sepulchre he easily distanced Peter, so now he arrived first in the palace. Moreover, he soon showed how brave he was, and how much in earnest to retrieve his temporary defection he was, by urging his way directly through all obstacles into the very apartment where Jesus had been taken for trial; he "went in with Jesus, and Peter stood at the door without."

2. The meaning of all this is what makes it so important. One has no need of being deceived ever as to the exact commencement of any defection from Christ. Backsliding is earliest in the "heart"; then it shows itself in one's "ways." Absalom was a rebel, while as yet he made no overt attack on his father's throne. The younger son was a prodigal before he started for the far country. Peter was a renegade and a poltroon from the earliest instant in which, listless and halting, he had begun to follow Jesus only "afar off." For an analysis of his experience would have disclosed three bad elements.

There was petulance in it. Simon's self-love was wounded when Jesus administered the somewhat extensive rebuke he had received. Evidently he supposed himself performing a rather fine exploit when he cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he

shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" He felt himself aggrieved. His defection began with sullenness. We cannot doubt that his countenance fell; he wore an injured expression.

There was distrust in his experience. We have seen that there was some reason for all the disciples to apprehend violence, instantaneous and passionate. Peter was fully responsible for that. The immediate result of his rashness was danger rather than deliverance. But could not Jesus be relied upon for rescue? Was not John fully protected afterwards?

There was unbelief in his experience. This disciple evidently had become ashamed of his adhesion to Jesus as the Messiah. An omnipotent Son of God was in his estimation for the moment letting things go too far, when he suffered himself to be apprehended by a rabble and maltreated in this way without a word. Perhaps Simon lost confidence in his cause. If the words of Matthew are to be taken literally, this disciple did not follow Jesus, even afar off, so much from affection as from curiosity; he went into the palace, not to see Jesus, but to "see the end."

II. Let us go a step farther now, and inquire concerning the results of this behaviour of Peter.

1. It took him away from Christ's personal presence. There was always to this disciple a peculiar

exhilaration and help in the companionship of his divine Lord. Under the shining of his countenance he constantly grows humble, gentle, and affectionate. Just as Mercury, that feeblest of all the planets in our solar system, seems most brilliant when likeliest to disappear, because nearest the sun, so Simon actually appears at his best when he is the most outshone; and the moment he wanders, he wanes.

Duty is to most of us what this personal leadership was to the disciples. If we follow our religious duties close up, they will bring us near Jesus.

2. Again, this behaviour separated Peter from the sympathy of Jesus' adherents. In union there is strength. Those disciples ought not to have allowed themselves to be scattered during the trials of that Passover night. For together they would have helped each other very much. Now we do not know what became of any of them except John. If Peter had been sitting by John's side, he certainly would have been safer. He was easily influenced, and the beloved disciple soon recovered his courage and loyalty.

Whenever professed Christians are seen to be falling away from each other by following the Master afar off, there is reason for alarm in reference to their spiritual interests. Only sin is solitary, and only guilt loves to live alone. Hence there is vast wisdom in the ancient counsel that believers should not forsake the assembling of themselves together,

as the manner of some is. Indeed, one of the most pathetic suggestions of this whole story comes from Simon's peculiar susceptibility to outward influences. It seems pitiful to think that John could not have been aware of Peter's entire behaviour that night. When the culmination of his crime in the denial was reached, his dear true friend was away in the other room with Christ. A mere look at the last was what brought this man to his senses. If he had stuck by his faithful comrade John, the old Bethsaida companion from his youth, he might have been spared the wretched shame of his final downfall. But this following of Christ afar off forced him to keep far from all those who might have helped him.

3. Moreover, this behaviour threw Peter hopelessly into the companionship of his enemies. How picturesque it seems all this time to think of John sitting serene, uninjured, and unreprieved in the hall of judgment itself, out of all danger simply because open and frank and dauntless in the midst of it! Peter fell into bad company the instant he fell out of good. The very language seems quaint; the moment he forsook the Master, he "sat with the servants"; in more senses than one he "was beneath in the palace."

The lesson for each Christian is found here. In a slinking, cowardly, unmanly desire to be a follower of Christ out of sight is the worst peril any one can dare. John went straight through the court where



those taunting maids and gibing soldiers were, and no one put a question to him. Pretty soon after that, we see him issuing orders to the servants. But Peter gets all the coarseness he can bear by making himself common.

III. It is time for us to inquire concerning the real cause of Simon Peter's defection that night.

1. It would not be enough to ascribe it just to a sudden fright of alarm. We have admitted in our analysis of his behaviour that he distrusted providential protection. But this man was not a coward. Few thoughtful students of Scripture would be satisfied with what the poet, Mrs. Browning, makes him say:—

"Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured, him  
Who trode the sea, and brought the dead to life?  
What should wring this from thee? Ye laugh and ask  
What wrung it? Even a torchlight and a noise,  
The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,  
And fear of what the Jews might do! Just that,  
And it is written, 'I forsook and fled.'  
There was my trial, and it ended thus."

If Simon Peter ever made such a reply as that, it would have proved him ignorant of his own heart. The secret of his backwardness was to be found in the long-settled habit of his religious life.

2. It was because his piety, at that period of his history, was fashioned more by feeling than by principle. Peter's spirituality blew in a gusty sort of way because his theological groundwork was faulty.

We remember more than one occasion when he deliberately interfered with our Lord's communication of the doctrine of the atonement. As a master, a teacher, a leader, he loved Jesus personally; there he rested. Jesus away, he failed. Soft gales do not always waft to the haven; they the rather often aid in an unperceived drift towards the open sea.

Simon loved to have all things beautiful and serene. He was the man who grew ecstatic on the mount of transfiguration, and proposed that Jesus should stay there. Once, when Christ was telling of his sufferings, of his coming shame, of his necessary crucifixion, Peter interrupted him with the plea, "Pity thyself, Lord!" His sensibilities were so shocked at the thought of the Saviour's maltreatment, that he protested against the official act of sealing the covenant of redemption with blood. The words were characteristic: "This shall not be unto thee."

Now let it be remembered that for nobody is there any hope of standing firm under stress of opposition, if his piety has been nurtured only in tender hours of emotional enjoyment. Spiritual impulses will be dangerously irregular and intermittent unless they have the help of steady purpose underneath. Carpenters never cut ships' knees from tropical palms. Those trees have grown too much in the sunshine, and been rooted too luxuriously in the bog moisture; they would not stand.

strains. And so the grand doctrines of the cross must be wrought into the very fibre of one's soul, as the granite soil and the winter tempests of the mountains are wrought into the gnarls of the oak which the shipwright loves.

That is to say, Christian character is reared out of a determinate wrestle with sin. It must begin with a consciousness of one's indwelling depravity and lost condition by nature. It must continue with one's recognition of the ineffable holiness of God, and the consequent ill-desert of all impurity and transgression. It must grow in the full sense of divine justice which asserts the absolute impossibility of any pardon save on the ground of law, satisfied, magnified, and glorified, by an atonement involving penalty paid and sacrifice rendered. Then each believer will want to follow the Lord closely, because he understands the revelation of a Saviour through the disclosure of his own soul's peril and need. "The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law and make it honourable."

IV. Finally, let us inquire concerning the admonition which is suggested by this behaviour of Peter.

1. How can this sin be repeated in our time? We follow Jesus afar off when we refuse to defend the doctrines of redemption before unbelievers who scoff at a blood atonement; when we allow the rules

and institutions of the Christian Church to be derided or belittled in our hearing; when we neglect the ordinances of God's house and refuse the fixed practice of family devotion; when we strain Christian liberty to see how much of indulgence in worldliness an unattacked church membership will bear. There is no difficulty whatever in modern experience in the way of repeating Peter's wrong.

2. It is a better question to ask, How can this sin of following Christ afar off be avoided in our time? John, and not Peter, is our pattern. The way to escape the taunts of maid-servants in the hall is to go right up the steps into the presence of Jesus. When he came into the house of the high priest, he pushed swiftly through all compromising associations in the ante-room at once. There is no evidence that John even so much as stopped to warm his hands at the coal fire beside which Simon Peter denied his Lord. Devotion always grows safer as it grows more intense. Open acknowledgment in the beginning helps to bar the way to flagrant denial in the end. In John's daring is found his defence. He was not left to be ashamed, because he had respect unto all his Lord's commandments. Simon fell into the denial because he followed only afar off.

3. So at the last we begin to see how experience renders counsel valuable.

It touches us to the heart to read the words which

show how well Simon understood all his cowardice and folly years afterwards. When he was leaving his closing message for the churches, this sober old apostle pleaded with all the Christians to beware of instability and backsliding; to pray for God's grace to help them to stand bravely for what was right and true.

Listen, then, to Simon Peter himself as to a man who sinned deeply, and repented with all his heart: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *THE DENIAL AT THE DOOR.*

"But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest." — MARK xiv. 68.

SADDER verses are nowhere to be found in the annals of Christian biography than these which stand at the end of this fourteenth chapter of Mark. If it be true, as it has been assumed all along in these expositions, that this is the part of the New Testament which Simon Peter personally supervised, so that the evangelist whose name is attached to it may be understood to have received from that apostle whatever facts he has recorded in his Gospel, then such a humiliating narrative as that of the great denial illustrates the remarkable honesty of this erring follower of Jesus in confessing his sin quite as vividly as the worst particulars of it do the heinousness of the sin itself.

I. The circumstances under which this great guilty act was performed are exceedingly dramatic. The story shifts its phases like an artistic series of pictures highly coloured for an Oriental play.

1. The scene is laid in the quadrangle of the high priest's residence in Jerusalem, whither that miscellaneous mob of people had hurried Jesus after his apprehension in the garden of Gethsemane.

It will be necessary for those who desire to understand this rehearsal to form for themselves a conception of Peter's precise whereabouts during such a grand crisis of his history. Eastern dwellings of the better sort appear to have been built around a four-sided court—an interior space like a private yard enclosed—frequently paved with flat flagging-stones, and open to the sky overhead. Into this area in the present instance a passage from the street came by an arched opening through one side of the walls; heavy folding-doors guarded the entrance, leaving a smaller wicket gate close by, for the convenience of visitors who called familiarly or slipped in one at a time. Usually a porter kept this or a maid made it her business to watch against those who might come on wrong errands. Such, in all likelihood, was the usual arrangement and fashion of buildings like Caiaphas' palace. Simon Peter was inside of the wicket standing there in the courtyard. Some chilliness was in the atmosphere; the company, into the midst of which before this John, the beloved disciple, had found his way, and which a man like him would not notice as he hurried through, was made up of an ordinary miscellany of servants and soldiers. Belated and bewildered, no

doubt rendered vociferously gossipy by their unwonted excitement on the night of our Saviour's trial, they had kindled "a fire of coals" a little way off out of the draught in the open space. The hour of this arraignment of Jesus was unusual, the night was full of discomfort, and the confusion was fatiguing. The entire group appears irritable, and a touch of maliciousness is in the surly conversation. The girls are as coarse as the military men are boisterous and brutal, the Levites show themselves insolently triumphant as they find their victim now in what they deem the right hands, and the waiters are tired and impudent.

The fire at which Peter warmed himself along with the servants was doubtless of the sort still in use in a region where fireplaces and chimneys are unknown—at least, unknown to a genuine native house. The commonest sort of fire-making is in a brazier or chafing-dish. This is of various style and material, and is supplied with burning charcoal. Clumsy as this expedient seems, it is quite effectual for a good many purposes. It can be carried where wanted, and when put under one's cloak as he sits on the floor—as it often is—its efficiency cannot be questioned. The fire in them is about as great in quantity as that which tinsmiths use in their little portable furnaces. Indeed, the tinker's furnace and the chafing-dish are often identical in the East.



Everything shows picturesquely there among the fitting uniforms and costumes. The flicker of the flame makes all the quadrangle dance with uncouth shadows, the faces of the men and maidens are ruddy under the red glow of the coals; ill-tempered and testy with the raw air and the long waiting in the midnight, they jostle each other and join wits in gibing roughly about the capture of the Nazarene Prophet at last.

Enter Simon Peter now — the chief actor in this awful tragedy of the denial. Into the midst of the throng comes a burly figure, hurrying up towards the coals — a quick-stepping individual, evidently trying to do that peculiar thing which almost everybody, one time or another in his life, has tried to do, and nobody at any time has ever for even once succeeded in accomplishing; namely, to look unconscious, and to keep unconcerned when absorbently anxious, to seem unnoticed and so remain unembarrassed when he knows all the rest are staring at him.

That newcomer is our well-known Bethsaida man, Simon, the fisher son of Jonas; and he is now endeavouring to act at perfect ease, although he is certain that he is and ought to be an object of suspicion from the moment he shows himself. "He sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire." Picture him now, away from all his associate Christians who were trying to prove that Jesus in

his ignominy and his shame was dearer to their hearts than ever. Simon sits there with his hands held over the coals among the sullen enemies of his Lord. There is some evidence that the foolish disciple imagined he might pass himself off for one of the crowd who went out to apprehend Jesus, if only he had boldness and luck enough to mingle unabashed with the shivering company around the fire. So he pressed up nearer, elbowing his way in towards the centre of the crowd; this was what hastened his exposure.

Now commences the dialogue of the drama. A girl kept the wicket door connecting with the street; this fact reminds us of the office of the damsel named Rhoda, whom we meet in another part of Peter's history farther on. When this waitress of the high priest's family, a pert maiden and quick-witted, as we might easily conjecture, opened the entrance on the front side of the area at John's request, Peter looked a swift moment inside and saw quite through the narrow passageway forth into the uncovered quadrangle. The spectacle of two men, one some few steps behind the other, must have seemed dusky to her eyes gazing into the obscurity of the night; but when Peter caught a glimpse of the red glow in the brazier and pushed impetuously in with something of a sort of swagger in his demeanour directly towards the blaze, his visage was, most likely, lit by the light of it, so that she thought she recognized

him as one she had met somewhere before. Hence she followed him in his rush as he sought the brazier, making herself sure of the man by a fresh stare at him in the full light, and commenced the conversation: "And as Peter was beneath in the court, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest; and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and saith, Thou also wast with the Nazarene, even Jesus. But he denied, saying, I neither know, nor understand what thou sayest: and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And the maid saw him, and began again to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. But he again denied it. And after a little while again they that stood by said to Peter, Of a truth thou art one of them; for thou art a Galilean. But he began to curse, and to swear, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And straightway the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word, how that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept."

"And thou wast also with Jesus of Nazareth." That was true; only an hour ago this disciple was really with the agonizing Saviour under the shadows of the olives in Gethsemane. Alas! it was darker then for him in that bonfired and flickering quadrangle in such an hour and in such a companionship than it was in the evening gloom of the garden

where the soldiers had to bring lanterns to see. For Peter had deliberately numbered himself with his Lord's enemies. So he answered with a desperate and unmitigated lie that he did not know what she meant: "I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest." The woman is for an uneasy moment put down; the curtain falls; the denial is begun; history is written; all the rest follows right on as a matter of course.

II. We must arrest our study of the melancholy tale here, for it is high time that we should seek for the practical lessons taught in a great wild catastrophe of character and experience like this of Peter.

1. We see, for one thing, how commonplace is even the most notable of human sins. This denial of our Lord will always be quoted as a tremendous and conspicuous act of wickedness before the universe. Not only as the chief and characteristic misdeed of Simon Peter, but likewise it flames forth in history as one of the vast crimes of the world and the race; it is actually a case celebrated in the annals of the ages. And now we have seen precisely what it was. A servant-girl once taunted a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ with having been with that famous rabbi in his season of prayer on the slope of Mount Olivet; and the man angrily told her that he was not there, he did not know Jesus, nor did he apprehend what she was talking about when she accused him.

That was not a very big thing to do ; anybody could have done the same, and more too, without straining the usual gifts of human intelligence, or gaining much credit for smartness. It was a poor little indulgence of fear and stupidity, a dull bit of surliness and lying that any ordinary fisherman could have equalled in saucing a servant-girl.

Nay ; do not count it lightly because it seems so silly or coarse in itself. In this contemptibleness of simplicity lies its danger, as a possible suggestion of iniquity to us in modern times. To deny this same Jesus is so easy a thing that we can fall into it and hardly know it after all ; such wrong is not singular nor unusual. Christ's gospel and Christ's cause and Christ's kingdom are in arrest to-day as openly as was Christ himself there in the high priest's palace. We "stand in jeopardy every hour." Satan's ingenious policy is to rush suddenly on us with the surprise of a taunt with a sting of ridicule in it. Nothing more than such a small matter as omitting family prayer because an awkward stranger is in the room ; or putting on a ribald air when scurrilous worldlings twit us with being serious ; or staying away from divine services when company is at our house ; or hastily shutting up the Bible as an acquaintance enters and finds us reading our morning chapter ; or belonging to one church because it is cheap, and attending another because it is fashionable ; nothing more than this is necessary in order

to deny the Lord and Saviour and so commit Simon Peter's sin. It needs only that we do some trivial wrong to make us responsible for all the meaning and the meanness of Simon's denial of Christ. "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

2. We see, likewise, a ready explanation of the mysterious lapse into crime sometimes noticed in the lives of apparently good men. Now no one doubts that Simon Peter was a regenerate Christian; how happens it that he crashed down into wickedness so abruptly? The answer to an inquiry so naturally indignant must be found in the disclosures of the man's previous history. Simon had been for a long time preparing himself unconsciously for such a disaster. He was self-confident, impulsive, hot-headed, and rash. Many a time had he been publicly rebuked.

One of the brightest of our modern writers has given us a simile somewhat like this: If a careless reader lets fall a drop of ink into a book he is just closing, so that it lodges among the leaves, it will strike through the paper both ways, — towards the beginning, towards the end. Whenever he opens the same volume again, he could begin with the earliest faint appearance of the stain, and measure by its increase in conspicuousness his progress towards that great black point of defacement. Open it anywhere, and he can detect some traces of

the indelible blot; he can turn back to it; he can turn forward to it; sure that ere long he will be able to recognize exactly where the ink fell in.

So of this great base act of the apostle Peter which we call emphatically the Denial. It is a stain in the middle of his life. Most of us have a profound admiration and a real regard for this old loving fisherman from Bethsaida, even if we do deny absolutely that he was in after days ever set up for the first pope. But hitherto, as we pushed on our study of his biography, we might often have seemed to see these signs of the denial coming nearer. Along the way hints of it begin to appear. One who reads the Gospels for the first time would be certain to remark, "One man there is here who will be in awful peril and shame some day; he is demoralized already; he will collapse before long."

This might be true of most ill-regulated, over-confident Christians who eventually come to a crisis of temptation. The corruption or depravity has been fermenting within their hearts longer than they imagined, longer than any one suspected of them. "Men fall," so said the shrewd Guizot once, "upon the side towards which they lean."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *LYING LAPSING INTO PROFANITY.*

"But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak." — MARK xiv. 71.

WE left Simon Peter standing in the open area of Caiaphas' house in Jerusalem, the ruddy light of the coal-fire falling over his cowering figure as he shrinks away from the pert servant-girl who is claiming that she saw him in the company of Jesus. He looks about the same as ever, but we are not to forget that an awful change has passed upon his moral nature just previous to his arrival in the court. Indeed at the wicket gate, which the damsel had opened again when John came back after him, having permission from the head of the house to introduce a friend, he had told a deliberate lie and denied his Lord and Master.

It was easy enough to put a girl like that down on a question of fact, and then push inside and get himself lost in the crowd which was huddled around the pan of coals. But the persistent young woman, vexed by his manner, or feeling herself challenged



by his curtness, seems to have followed him through the passage into the space where the soldiers were gathered; this time she had with her another maid to insist on the identification and confirm her words. The two of them had full chance now to stand in the shadow and study his features at their leisure. Peter was evidently deeply agitated, but was trying to escape a scrutiny at once so dangerous and so exasperating, and conceal himself from observation; he sat down as if quite at ease among the crowd. It was only a little while afterwards that he heard the same pertinacious voice crying out, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth." Immediately Peter in his consternation sprang up and faced his sharp tormentor. She, knowing now she had him fast, turned quietly to her companion and remarked, "This is one of them." That roused Simon's rage; struggling to extricate himself, he floundered down a deeper depth into passionate prevarications, and cried out, "Woman, I know him not." Then the other waitress put in her evidence, with a string of sarcasm in it: "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth." To this Simon, now clearly gone with a perfect tempest of anger, replies once more that he did not understand what she meant, he did not know the man; and then he adds for an intensity of asseveration an oath to prove the truth of his lie.

So he reached his second denial; falsehood had grown into swearing, lying had lapsed into perjury;

nobody saw where the end would be. It is always wise to remember that in most cases there is a preparatory course of demoralized experience and debased action before a wicked culprit rushes into a capital crime. Weakness makes way for anger and temper renders the will feeble, and afterwards we discover that the open sin is only the inner corruption bursting out through the barriers which pride and self-seeking had worn thin by indulgence. The history that comes on in order subsequent to every sin must enter into the estimate we make of the moral quality which the sin possesses. No comet of iniquity ever dashed athwart a sky full of orbits of orderly stars, without being followed by a sweeping train; but the train, in its substance, is always a part of the nucleus body. Very few acts of transgression are elemental and singular; they mostly carry trains that are as guilty as themselves, for they are parts of the same intention. So it comes to pass that consequences are reckoned with all ill-doing. A general truth underlies the statement made by one of the apostles that wrote epistles for the wide world to read and ponder: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point shall be guilty of all."

We must return to our narrative; for there is one step more down the slope of wrong that this disciple takes. By this time Peter knows that he is discovered; his position is understood. He seeks to

get away from the dangerous company. Out of the light of the fire he seems to slink behind the rest, and at last he reaches the dark passage that leads into the street, and conceals himself there. We have no account of his stay among those shadows: he is gone for an hour; what his meditations were, what his shame or his fears or remorse, we are not informed by any one of the evangelists. But it was dark there, cold, and uncomfortable; and we are not much surprised to find that somehow this man has got himself back into the quadrangle, and is mingling with the men. They are evidently talking about the Galilean rabbi who is under accusation in the council chamber. Perhaps they recalled what the attendants had been whispering a while before; for when Peter advanced a little way into the noisy circle, one of the bystanders looked over at him and said to another, with a great air of confidence in his speech, "Of a truth this fellow was also with him; for he is a Galilean." Peter probably overheard his remark, for he replied with a flash of temper, "Man, I know not what thou sayest." That started the whole crowd into derision and jeers; for the moment he spoke up naturally and went thoroughly off his guard, they recognized his brogue, and cried out with one voice, "Surely thou art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee; thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto." Then spoke this tempestuous old fisher-

man at the height of his wrath. He began to use the traditional Capernaum billingsgate as well as its dialect. Curses and oaths of asseveration flew from his excited lips in volleys; without stint he lapsed back on his early training among the boatmen, seafaring creatures, fishers, and pilots, of Lake Genesaret, and gave the mocking loungers around him the whole of his mind. "He began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak."

The word rendered "curse" means to *anathematize*, and it has that peculiar turn to it which signifies that he cursed himself; he let off his explosions of unclean wrath at his own soul and at theirs with all the usual ingenuity of profane, foolish men who are trying to make more force in their speech by sending themselves and others where swearers, according to good scholarship in the Scriptures, generally go.

Here we pause in our study of this inspired story. It is one of the most picturesque, and at the same time one of the most cheerlessly instructive, in the New Testament. We must gather some few of the admonitions, and try to profit by them, or we shall lose all the pain we have been compelled to feel while we have been looking upon the unusual spectacle of a man good at heart committing a crime of the greatest magnitude, shaming himself and the world and the Church for the ages.

1. For one thing, we learn that sometimes one's sins fit him for more excellent service in the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

This warning of Peter that he would speedily be tested with violent tossings up and down by the devil was evidently meant to work out a distinct purpose of good for those of whom he was to become a guide. "When thou art converted, strengthen the brethren." We feel sure that Peter afterwards recalled this admonition. For the word here rendered "strengthen" is quite a new and unusual word. Still, we find that Simon Peter employs it twice in his Epistles, and that, too, in intimate connection with sober admonitions concerning the temptations of Satan. This forces us to think that when he recalled the warning of his Lord, the very phraseology of the Master fastened itself in his mind with an exact reproduction of the scene. One thing is always true: it is sure to be known whether a man has gained his power to strengthen others in the furnace of hot experience. Deep humiliations are a school for the highest usefulness. John Bunyan's pastor said of him, remembering the old tinker had never received much education, "He hath, through grace, taken these three heavenly degrees, to wit, union with Christ, the anointing of the Spirit, and the experience of the temptations of Satan, which do more fit any man for that mighty work of preach-

ing the gospel than all the university learning and degrees that can be had."

2. Again: we see the immeasurable peril of just one act of wrong-doing: it drags in its sure connection others more guilty than itself.

Indeed, one crime never seems to remain alone. The first denial led straight along to two more of the same sort — then to lying — then to profanity — then to perjury — then to blasphemy outright. It is as supreme a silliness to prate about a little sin as it would be to talk of a small decalogue that forbids it or a diminutive deity that hates it, a tiny devil who tempts it or a shallow hell that punishes it.

It does not help the matter to assert that this servant-girl 'had no right to know the answer to her impertinent question. Nor does any help come from declaring that Peter was in peril of his life, and then insisting that, if he had been discovered, his arrest would have surely followed. For the fact is, John had all the exposures to attack in every direction which Peter had, and yet he did not waver for a single instant in his great loyal love for Jesus. He unhesitatingly swept across that area into the very room where the Master was sitting silent and suffering in the presence of his judges. Never after this is John to be seen away from Jesus' side till the last sorrowful moment of his Master's life; and yet nobody touches him with even one word of abuse. The

best way to treat a real peril is often to go right up towards it. Simon moves on in a melancholy descent of steps to ruin, simply because he began wrong. It was because he came in hesitant and suspicious and cringing out of sight, that those people set out to badger and to chaff him. The denial was inevitable after he once got started in it.

3. Finally, we see how much we ourselves owe to the restraining grace of God, which supplements our weakness with omnipotent strength.

Peter came forth from the Lord's Supper to go to Gethsemane; but he slept in the garden while his Lord was in agony of prayer and sweat of blood. He rushed forth from Gethsemane up into the palace of Caiaphas, apparently as brave as a lion; there he went down before the mere taunt of a servant-girl. Then he hides a whole hour in a dark gangway till he plucks up some more courage, and marches out into company cool and confident and curious as ever. Then a man mentions that he thinks he is a Galilean and so knows Jesus; and up gets Simon in a passion at the very suggestion, swearing at himself and the man and everybody, to prove he had not been in the Mount of Olives, and never saw Jesus!

Do not judge him harshly and finally just here; give that to God to do, and for ourselves let us be humble. There is no place more exposed to temptation, or more awfully historic with downfalls,

than the room where Christians meet for the Sacrament. Remember the suggestive words of the Psalmist as you think of this disciple going from the very Upper Chamber of the Communion to the sin of the Denial: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."



## CHAPTER XV.

### *THE COCK-CROW AND THE LOOK OF JESUS.*

"And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." — LUKE xxii. 60, 61.

IT would not be easy to find anywhere else in the Scriptures the close collocation in one line of language of two things more incongruous than these here in the text: "And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." It seems, rhetorically considered, like the mingling of the sentimental with the grotesque, the commonplace with the infinite — this association of divine tenderness in reproach with the ordinary announcement of the time of day from an outhouse wall, or the fathomless significance of one of Jesus Christ's looks with the nonsensical clarion of a fowl. But this incident has made its mark on ecclesiastical history, and that "feathered songster chanticleer" has gained a place in poetry and art, and a recognition on steeples as a herald to warn against spiritual slumber.

It is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark that the

cock crowed twice, as our Lord had told Simon Peter he would; the other evangelists agree in their notice of only this final fulfilment of the sign. If Peter's supervision was what gave Mark's narrative its accuracy, it will prove to be a matter of interest to recall that thus the fact meets the previous prediction. Jesus had said the cock should be heard twice; Mark puts it on record that this one, heard now, was "the second time." Now it does not seem as if it ought to be supposed that there was anything marvellous, much less miraculous, in this performance of the cock in the melancholy drama of Simon Peter's denial of his Master. He can be credited with no intelligent part in the solemnity of Jesus' trial. All rural people are well aware that birds and beasts and reptiles are gifted with characteristic instincts in the choice of their utterances by night and by day. Cocks crow as frogs croak and whippoorwills cry, each in their own vernacular, as owls hoot and eagles scream, and they select their own occasion and season for the exercise. But always the farm-hands expect to hear shrill sounds from the henroosts about eleven or twelve by the clock, and then after a silence they are awaked again by the same noisy chorus just before the dawn. This "clear chanter" was doubtless doing his own rude singing in his own tongue, at his own will and before his usual audience, with no reference to the awful tragedy in the high priest's palace. Spiritual

common sense would not be dissatisfied with the statement that he was altogether unconsciously employing his customary endowment, and Jesus knew beforehand that a creature like him would furnish a sign in the neighbourhood loud enough for a fisherman, born in the village of Bethsaida, such as Simon Peter was, to hear readily. So the warning was plain; it was as if our Saviour had told his disciple that, with all his brave protestations made then, he would three times deny him between the midnight and the dawn.

Hence this man's sin was aggravated by his heedlessness of those two signals. One might think he would have been on the watch each moment through the hours for the token which was coming to his ear. The first sound would arrest his attention, and then he would speak to his very soul with a sober sense of danger: "There is one hint of peril in the midnight! Let me be on the alert from this instant forward. I am to hear that same crowing once more; I shall be in jeopardy till after daybreak!" And just then the girl at the door catches him, and another girl with her challenges him, and then the soldiers strike in; thus he is diverted and surprised, forgets everything, lies and swears with impotent passion. So he neither watches nor hears. The name Simon is said to mean "listening," but Peter does not listen. The hours swiftly flit away; the cock crows again unheard; the crime is consummated!

Historians are accustomed to say that Cæsar's life might easily have been saved if he had only opened and read the letter which he received on the way to the Senate house where he fell. It was put boldly in his hands, and it disclosed the whole conspiracy, but he left it untouched. What is the use of warning a man if he will not pay attention, and take proper care of himself? Down into history went the insignificant fowl that did his best to lift the usual outcry, but small credit does he deserve for any service he did that night for Simon Peter; and yet it was Peter who was to blame for the failure. There has always been told a traditional story concerning this apostle's remorse after he had fallen. It certainly represents his posture of mind, although we have no means of verifying the truth of it. Old chroniclers relate that he was accustomed to rise at the instant when the sound of the cock-crowing was heard, and then would fall on his knees in heart-felt acknowledgments of his sin, while the cry was yet in the air.

We leave this part of the story; there is no further use for our study in the history of the little creature who unconsciously filled a conspicuous place in the temple of fame by simply doing his duty. The great force of the lesson we learn to-day is found in the other clause of the verse: "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter."

It is not strange to find that, dramatic as this

scene may seem, no one of the great artists of history has ever attempted to paint it. It was worthy of the genius of Raphael, but his pencil evidently withdrew from a task of imagination so delicate. The pose of affairs is a prosaic grouping of particulars having no colouring of importance. The shrill cry of that morning monitor came into the area where Peter kept hurrying himself around so as to be out of sight and yet see. Then he suddenly recognized the signal which Jesus had left him. It brought a swift sense of his infinite spiritual jeopardy into his consciousness. Matthew says, "And Peter remembered." Mark says, "And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him." One can have no doubt that a man like this would be intensely agitated. Simon's whole frame showed itself in the flicker of the flame from the fire of coals; it would be lit now fairly, and whoever saw it would know how his heart was trembling under the strong rush of painful recollection. He had come altogether to his senses; his frightened eyes swept across the quadrangle, and on through the passage into the judgment hall where Jesus sat, and then he sent one furtive glance, as anxious as it was guilty, straight toward the face of his patient and suffering Lord. He desired to know if he had been observed: "And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter."

That is the picture now: Simon faces Jesus, and

the world watches the two souls in their spiritual conversation through their eyes.

Very pathetic is this as a proof of the unceasing thoughtfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who would have conjectured that when Peter, who was most concerned in this crowing of a cock outside, had neglected the signal, Jesus would bear it in mind? Moreover, note carefully, as the narrative grows more and more excited, how supreme is the exact crisis of affairs at which this incident occurred. A tempest of wrath full of menace and blows was rushing over the groups of priests in the council. The president was tearing his garments, the hall was wild in a sudden roar of spite and rancorous outcries of blasphemy, bigots had just begun to grow so violent as to suggest attack on the prisoner who sat in their presence; at that moment the forlorn little creature upon the wall took his time to crow; and the Lord of heaven and earth heard the pitiful piping of the small voice, and gave a great thought to it, because it was the signal for his dear disciple's last chance. In the midst of distraction, in the point of time which marked the one terrible exigency of his history, when it would seem that every sensibility of his body and soul would be absorbed in the intensity of his own solicitude, just then the Lord of glory gives a thought to Simon Peter!

This look of Jesus, off through the struggling

crowd, and on beyond into the quadrangle, till it found the erring man who still loved his Lord with all his passionate heart, will bear analysis. It was in Peter's spiritual history what finally saved his soul; for it instantly stopped him in his career of lying and swearing and madness of sin.

In the first place, it was a look of reminiscence. It seemed to bear with it all the memories of the past. It was so sad, perhaps, so intensely pitiful, so like what Simon had seen his Master give a great sinner a hundred times in a day in the old dear walks through Galilee. It must have scared him to think that he had gone down so low now that his faithful Lord had to look at him as if he were an outcast, too!

How remorseful must have been the recollections which that flash of sensibility from the eye of his Saviour brought to this man! Peter would look back to the hour when Andrew first led him to the feet that he had sat at so long as a pupil. He would think of Capernaum, of the old lake near it, of Bethany and Bethsaida, the old hours and the dear communings of spirit in the journey through Galilee. Every word Jesus had spoken, every deed of kindness he had done, would come to mind, as this poor broken-hearted man looked back into the gentle eyes that now regarded him with such divine commiseration, so mournful, so grieved!

Then, also, this was a look of reproof. It would

be a miserable mistake for any one ever to imagine that Jesus Christ is too tender to be true. With all his affection for Simon Peter, we may be sure he had no notion of looking upon his guilt with any other emotion than that a just judge, who was also a sincere friend, could afford to indulge. The denial must have seemed to him an insult and an outrage; it must surely have caused Jesus serious and deep displeasure. It is not unlikely that in this glance of the eye at Peter under such circumstances there was more of awful rebuke than even there was in the voice of the Lord when that terrible denunciation was given him, "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

Did you ever have the feeling within your heart, when you had openly admitted that you had injured one of your friends, and were truly ashamed and sorry for it: "Oh, I wish he would only be hard with me as I deserve, would get angry outright, strike me, sting me, anything, but just what I know he will do—look at me so sad and pained, and be dazed and wondering as if he could not imagine I could do such things, when I knew how it would break up all hope and love between us"?

I imagine that was the way in which Simon took his reproach. He knew now that all chance of explanation and apology was lost; they had begun to hustle Jesus out for crucifixion; he would not see him again. He would have to carry this burden all his life. My conviction is always profound that the



hardest to bear of all the retributions in hell will for the finally lost be their recollection of the silent looks of Jesus Christ whom they have denied and rejected through the years.

But this could not have been all there was in that glance of Jesus' eye. It was a look likewise of encouragement. The Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but would rather that the wicked, even the worst that deny him, turn unto him and live. He said this to Simon Peter, I have not the least doubt, in that one look he gave him.

Utter despair would have killed this man just as surely as it, a few hours after, did kill Judas. Human endurance cannot bear beyond a certain amount of strain. Our Lord would surely, knowing this affectionate disciple's heart, throw into that glance in this parting moment all the infinite yearning and tenderness of his love. That look would say, "Simon, come back to me!" It would repeat the verse from the old psalm, "I will instruct thee in the way in which thou shalt go, I will guide thee with mine eye!" And after that there would be no more peril of departure, for the Lord would hold him by his hand.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *THE TEARS OF GENUINE REPENTANCE.*

“And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.” — LUKE xxii. 62.

THE repentance of Simon Peter has been used as a theme by painters of the highest repute in almost all the famous schools, but rarely to a Christian student's satisfaction. Some particulars of each scene on the canvas show excellence, but the general conception seems gross. Most of us have admired the work of Murillo in the Louvre gallery; but it is so untrue to fact in the details that it fails to help one's imagination. The Saviour is represented as fastened with thongs to what is an awkward column, and his head is crowned with thorns. Before him kneels Simon in deep abasement of suffused feeling, apparently praying for pardon. In “Sacred and Legendary Art” mention is made of a painting in a Spanish collection in which the man is holding a handkerchief with which he has been wiping his eyes, and the cock that crowed has a place upon the shaft to which Jesus is bound. Such conceptions have a small value only, as poor things well done.

The reverent reader ought to gain a better sense of the spectacle from the verses of the Gospels than from anything which the masters in the Old World have offered. A pitiable absence of sentiment and elevated thought is instantly felt.

From the sudden beginning of Simon Peter's repentance to its abrupt and tempestuous explosion beyond the gate, one peculiar characteristic of genuineness is to be observed — the complete assumption of his individual responsibility for the sin before God committed in the acts of denial and profanity. "Peter went out and wept bitterly." Not over Jesus' suffering, not over Judas' betrayal, not over Mary's misery; but over his own terrible transgression. It is comparatively easy for any one to weep over other people's wickedness with great bitternesses of reproach and condemnation; it is hard to confess ownership in sin.

We see this from the deliberate pause for consideration which he makes. The moment he caught that look of Jesus, he "called to mind the word" of warning. Our imagination pictures him as startled and seized as if by an unseen hand, stopped in his tracks as he is skulking among the shadows, held up face to face with his Master before him forcing a heedful consideration. "He thought thereon." He had to think. It is the old experience of the Psalmist: "I thought upon my ways and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." This small touch of

history is not entered in the narratives of Matthew and Luke; it appears only in Mark's Gospel, the one Simon Peter is supposed to have supervised. It is the more suggestive and indeed somewhat pathetic to find it here; for sympathetic readers will see how anxious this rough old fisherman, usually so impulsive and headlong, was now to have it known that he had for once been deliberate in the estimate of the terrible wrong he had done in denying his Lord and Master. In all evangelical repentance which a sinner exhibits there is a process of sober meditation and spiritually intense discussion conducted in his soul, like that which was pictured by Christ himself in the parable of the prodigal son. Resolve results from reflection; the mind is made up, and then the will takes a stand.

In the case of Simon Peter there was really no time for anything like a set period of meditation; whatever experience of such a sort he had must have been almost instantaneous. It is said that, when one is in mortal peril, as from drowning, for example, or precipitation off a height, a singular activity of both intellect and imagination is exercised. Every incident of one's life seems to flash across his excited recollection in retrograde succession, not in detailed outline, but as if just enough of minute and collateral features were preserved to indicate a kind of panoramic view of his actions. And, most singular of all, each act is accompanied by a recognized and

individual perception of its immoral character before God. Hence the man is constrained, in one swift moment of retrospection, to pronounce upon his own spiritual standing in the sight of his Maker. Now this may serve for our illustration in the case of the disciple who denied his Lord, at the moment when he encountered the look of Jesus after the cock crew. There must have been something analogous to it in that overpowering consciousness of a divine arraignment for his crime. Doubtless the entire record of that awful night's history went surging tumultuously through his brain with a flash of intelligence at each feature and a keen throb of pain.

He saw where it first began; he remembered how he followed Jesus afar off. He noted each aggravation in turn that attended it. In the full disclosure made by the glance of the eye then looking at him, this man could now estimate and register how much it included. No doubt he felt awestruck at the abyss down which he had been gazing hitherto unmoved. Men sometimes talk about needing more conviction of sin before they will surrender to Christ. If they are honest, if there is really a desire for poignancy or painful remorse, surely there is a way which is quite open to them. All sin should be judged of in the light of an easily reached standard of measurement; it is to be reckoned as it appears before the infinite holiness of God's character in full display.

I have seen a globule of water that to my eye seemed crystal and clear as the beautiful glass which held it; but on turning it up right between me and the sun, so that a ray of noonday blaze fell upon it or streamed through it, I discovered it was all alive with corruption and foul forms of obscene life. A whole world of filthiness was in just a drop; it had been there all the time; the sunshine did not make it, it showed it. No matter how brilliant or showily white any being may be, as he looks at himself or as he constrains others to look at him while he is posing as a saint, he will see another vision the moment he goes up into the air where he will be compelled to pass a beam of God's holiness directly into his soul. There is found in one of the New Testament epistles the expression "godly sincerity." This means literally "judged in the sunlight before God." It is a figure drawn from a lapidary's art. He is accustomed to hold up his jewels between his glass and the full blaze of noon; if there be any flaw in the structure, this examination will be sure to disclose it. So flaws in character appear instantly when looked at in the light of God's countenance. Hence the wrong-doer must test his wrong-doing by the standard of the divine purity, before he will have a satisfactory conviction of sin. When that revelation of a white throne of judgment, and of the Judge who sits in it, is made, he will be ready to cry out, as did the penitent Job: "I have heard of thee by the

hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

The next step in Simon Peter's repentance was the immediate forsaking of his sin. He left the vicinity of temptation. He broke away from the companionships it involved. "He went out." That quadrangle, with the soldiers and the servants and the guards in it, was no longer safe to him, no longer welcome, no longer tolerable. He wanted to let out his soul. He was bursting with agony and shame and self-loathing. His vanity was wounded cruelly; he knew he had given himself away with no power of retrieval for ever. All the little sweet apologies for so uneducated a man, so impulsive in his manners, so stormy in his impetuous zeal—these all went now for naught. There can be no doubt that Simon understood himself better this moment than ever before, and confessed with intolerable self-loathing the meanness and cowardice which had made him lie and swear through the midnight. That one look of Jesus filled the whole moral atmosphere with hopeless illumination.

We have sometimes been out in the shadows of an evening that was almost supernaturally shadowed by the retreating clouds of a storm; in the sky the low reverberations of the thunder were heard now and then, although the tempest had spent its force. But it was still dark, very dark, with the fringes of

mist drawn tightly over the stars. We could see nothing; the marks of the roadway were obscured; we groped wearily for the path; we wondered where the bridge or the elm-tree or the gate of the cemetery or the steeple of the church could be. Suddenly a belated flash of lightning tore through the sky with the luminousness as well as the violence of a maniac comet broken loose from control, luridly filling the heavens from horizon to horizon with one flash of radiance more brilliant far than day. For an instant only — only one of the strokes of a clock in duration; come and gone across the landscape before we could drop our eyelids against the glare, thus it went while we shrank back astonished. But we saw the village! Every bit of that town was in sight for a single instant; and then all was dark; it grew darker than ever before. Still, we knew where everything was now. No use to cover up the neighbourhood any more. That one gleam flung trees and trellises, meadow and mountain, garden, park, and village green, in hopeless exposure into bold relief. And the night and the storm might now fold themselves over the scene at their will; they could not cover one landmark or guidepost out of what we had discovered already.

Just so that one look of Jesus Christ disclosed all the moral as well as all the spiritual horizon of himself to this disciple who knew he had basely denied his Lord, and now had nothing to show for it. It



was best for him to leave this place at once. He had there no affiliation with anybody. One great agony of conscious remembrance was over him for ever. Out of this — out of this! plainly that was his policy, that was his duty, that was his wisdom; the best thing he ever did was when he “went out”; the next best thing was when he “wept bitterly.”

Hence the final step in his repentance was shown in his weeping. It is always a pitiable spectacle to behold a mature man in tears. It proves that he has nearly reached the last degree of human anguish. I believe, however, that most thoughtful Christians will agree with me in saying that the most satisfactory presentation in the life of this humiliated disciple is that we seem to see as he stands outside the gate of the palace, crying as if his heart had been melted within him. For a believing heart is the only thing we know that is better when broken the most. The very word for penitence in Hebrew means “take comfort.”

It is not necessary that there should be any misunderstanding in the minds of believers, when they are taught that these tears of Peter opened his way once more to the favour of God. Tears are nothing as an atonement for sin; there is no grace in weeping as a mere exercise. A tear, so the ancient traditions say, glistened in the eye of this disciple as long as he lived. There would be no merit in that even if it were a fact; it would count only as an evidence

of his sorrow. He immediately gave up his sin — that was the point of notice. Then he instantly came back to duty, as soon as the way was opened, and he could get alongside of Christ once more. His Lord told him that as soon as he was converted he was to strengthen the brethren; that he did.

Peter was a better man for the awful fall he had. He made reparation to the extent of his opportunity. He caused one of the evangelists to write out as minute an account as could be given of the whole transaction. And without one word of extenuation or self-excuse he openly told the plainest stories of his fault, leaving them behind as a beacon-light on the shores of time to warn off others from shipwreck.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *THE FOOT-RACE FOR THE SEPULCHRE.*

"Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre." — JOHN XX. 3.

THE passage we are to study to-day exhibits the simplicity of an argument on which so much of the history and faith of the Church along the ages was to turn. It is an argument drawn from testimony to fact. Christ rose: how do we know that? Simon Peter saw him after he was alive again, and Mary Magdalene saw him also, and five hundred brethren.

It does not seem as if the history of such times as these of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus could run on without the presence of a figure in it so familiar as that of Simon Peter. And yet from the moment when he disappears into the night outside of the judgment hall in which his Lord had reproached him with a look, and stands weeping bitterly beneath the stars, he does not come before our eyes even so much as once more till the morning of the resurrection. We have no hint of his experience or whereabouts during the hours of Friday or Saturday.

From the fact that, when he does show himself again, Mary Magdalene finds him in the company of his old Bethsaida friend John, it has been conjectured that he passed some of this dread interval with those two mourners, Mary and her new "son," in the same terrible sorrow. He is not reported as having been seen while the Lord hung upon the cross in the agonies of death. It would be just like him to slink away from mortal eyes and bury himself in the shame and grief of his remorse. A man with the sensibilities of Peter would fairly rage with pain as the memory of that look Jesus gave him kept coming back anew. And how his imagination would picture the scene on Calvary, whenever a sound, wafted in through the crevices of the casement, told him that his Master agonized under fresh insults and spite! John would go forth into the city and find his way through the crowd to the cross-foot where Mary was to keep patiently sitting. But Simon would feel that he had no right ever to do that. He had had his chance and had flung it away.

It argues much for the magnanimity of the disciples that they even sometime afterwards took Peter back into their trust. They rushed off at first, but it was only the onset of a deadly fear; they soon gathered up their courage. But this man had taunted them with cowardice, and boasted of what he was going to do. Hence we find Peter with John, perhaps, but nobody except John, in those awful hours.

When over the sky came the shadows of the darkness in the afternoon, Simon would be likely to go forth to discover its meaning. He might hear the soldiers' curses, and see the townsmen come wailing by, smiting upon their breasts. But every relief was so hopeless now! No pain in any heart, no matter how deep may be the wound, can be sharper than that remorseful self-reproach with which one regards a wicked wrong he has done to one whom he loved, and who loved him, at the moment when he arrives at the full consciousness that all apology, all extenuation, all pleading for pardon, is irrevocably too late. We do not believe that Jesus had given up this poor broken-hearted disciple altogether; but what it was more like Simon to wish for was to have an opportunity for confession. He would long just to say: "Oh, forgive me, for I have sinned a dreadful sin! Grant me only thy forgiveness! Spare me, that I may recover strength before I go hence and be no more!" But that was too late.

It is just here that I am willing to believe that John stood beside his old partner on the Sea of Galilee, and did him the one splendid favour of his life. It appears to my way of thinking the likeliest thing that this wonderful Boanerges, "son of thunder," would do in the sad circumstances would be the looking up of Peter, after the Lord had done the looking at him. I assume that John saw the glance, and marked how the old Bethsaida boy took it. And

when the trial was over and Jesus was out of reach for the hours before daylight, I imagine I have sufficient knowledge of John to understand that he went around, behind that door in the passageway, and laid his warm, solid hand on the neck of Simon, saying to him, "Come along with me, come up to the house!"

Now let us not forget that this was early on Friday morning, the first Good Friday, and certainly the saddest the world ever knew; that John was out beside the cross during that awful day of shame and death and burial; and in the afternoon came back to his home, with his mother under his care, left by Jesus as his dear legacy. Then the others, one by one, the eleven men and some of the women, would probably gather at the former rendezvous, and these would learn that Simon was there; out of sight, perhaps, but crushed and penitent. The secrets of that terrible night which ushered in the Saturday morning can never be told; a merciful shadow falls over them all. Jesus lies in the stone sepulchre of the Arimathean benefactor, and the Christian Church is at its worst in bereavement. The cock crows as usual, at midnight and at dawn.

So the Saturday is ushered in. And if some imaginative expounder of Scripture were to tell us he believed that, when that signal cry was heard, Simon groaned in his uncontrollable agony under the new recognition of his sin, so that even Mary caught the

sound of his grief, and that John would talk to the others, and speak of the "look" he had observed in the eyes of the Master, till every heart was touched, I am ready to admit that I could not find any fault with the conjecture. I should say, "It was just like Simon, just like John, just like Mary!"

Once there had been spoken to the mother of our Lord wonderful words, as some shepherds came in and repeated what they had heard on Bethlehem hills; she did not make any reply, "but Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." And once this same silent woman, who was chiding her divine child in a moment of discipline, caught a sober look in his eyes as he gently answered that she ought to have borne in mind that he must be about his Father's business. She said no more at that time, nor ever afterwards, in the way of chiding; "his mother kept all these sayings in her heart." It seems to me that there need be no special mystery in the way these friends of Jesus took Simon Peter immediately back into their confidence. Life was fuller and richer when such depths of thoughtfulness had been reached. Most of those bereaved disciples had something to be forgiven for, as well as Peter had. The Saturday night passed, and then came the morning of the Lord's Day.

The story of the resurrection does not need to be told here with any special detail. The scene opens with a visit of some women to the grave; they found

the stone rolled away; they were told that the grand prophecy was fulfilled; Jesus had risen from the tomb, and had been in person seen and recognized; tidings were taken to the men forthwith; a group of three witnesses declared that he had spoken to them, saying a word of bright greeting — “All hail!” — to them as he passed. Mary, mother of James, Mary Magdalene and Joanna, agreed in this statement. But the men did not believe them; they counted the news as an idle tale.

Of course, the only thing to do was to go and see as to facts in the case; and just there the incident noted in the text is introduced: “Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.”

The phase of human life presented here is odd, to say the least. That these men should be in haste is natural enough, but why was there such an unseemly competition in a foot-race for a sepulchre? Could any such feeling as jealousy or rivalry possess such men under these sober circumstances? Are we not given a lesson concerning the state of mind of those two disciples? Is it far-fetched for us to imagine that this inartistic bit of human nature is thrown in casually here to act as an illustration of the depressing influence of a conscious memory of sin? Surely we cannot think that such an antagonism of running



was a physical trial of fleetness between these two alert and active men. Is the picture less or more instructive because we suppose that John's actual success in coming first to the tomb was not owing to his running faster than Peter as an athletic achievement, but to Peter's backwardness, as a spiritual hindrance growing out of the denial? This disciple may have been demoralized somewhat; perhaps he dreaded a meeting with that injured Friend whom he had so lately sworn he did not know. Such solemn hours as he had spent within the last two days must have perceptibly borne down the usually quite exuberant and satisfied spirits of an impulsive man like Simon. To meet a man risen from the dead was sober enough as an anticipation; to meet Jesus just now was more like an apprehension. Possibly this rendered his steps reluctant. It is not of any use to speculate further; our lesson is learned if the incident is enough to set us to thinking that wicked people will in all probability, if left to themselves, move very slowly on their way to judgment!

Nor is this precisely all which is suggested. Sin is ever weakening. It is just this that is the most serious result of each wicked act in one's life; it tends to break the force and dull the zeal of an intelligent sinner. It hurts your after-strength for good; think more of this, if you are tempted. Say in your heart, "Oh, if I do this bad thing, I

can never be what I was before — never so strong again!”

Furthermore, we learn from this history a lesson also concerning the manifestations of piety and personality. Here are two conspicuous disciples suddenly brought under the same forceful kind of exhibition. He who was fleetest on the way to the sepulchre proves the most reverent when they arrive at it. How artlessly the chief characteristic of Simon Peter comes to our notice in this headlong urging of himself into the midst of the solemn mysteries of that enclosure from which John by instinct shrank back! The one did not pause as the other did; Peter was of a different make; his temperament was more impulsive; sensitive as John was, he yet was less imaginative than John; more headlong even to heedlessness, he was deficient in reverence. Yet both were as deeply attached to Jesus as was possible, and both devout in heart. A disparity in age accounts for part of this difference, but not all. A better disposal of the question would simply refer it to one's natural peculiarities, or individualities as a man, in each of these cases.

The singular emulousness of these two disciples, running for the quickest sight of the sepulchre, seems almost like a foot-race of mere spiritual attributes. It is Faith and Love trying to distance each other in attaining a nearness to Jesus. Faith may be more moderate and Love more agile; but

Love proves sometimes a hesitating grace, and often Faith is over-bold. Love may be more delightful in its exercises, more enthusiastic and more fervid; but Faith has more penetrating power, and more courageous confidence and force. Now there is no warfare between such elements of character; indeed, he is the strongest Christian who has both richly blended in his soul. The contrast in the case before us is instructive as showing how believers can differ and still agree. Peter and John were the same in purpose; they started to greet Jesus. They were the same in impulse of zeal; they both ran. But the result proved that they differed in sensibility; John hesitated, while Peter bolted breathless through the opening into the chamber of burial to learn all that was to be seen. Most of all, however, they displayed how much they varied by the impressions they received; Peter noticed the linen clothes and the napkin, and was struck by the orderliness with which Jesus arose; John was arrested by the evidences of Christianity displayed. Peter saw and wondered; John "saw and believed."

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### *JESUS' APPEARANCE TO SIMON.*

“And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.”—I CORINTHIANS XV. 5.

IT is generally agreed among scholars that the apostle Paul sent this, his First Epistle to the Corinthians, from Ephesus, about twenty-five years subsequent to the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. He never claimed for himself that he had been an eye-witness of these important events to which he so often referred. He was not present when the Lord's Supper was instituted; he did not have any part in the terrible tragedy of the cross on Calvary; he was not on the stage of historic events when the resurrection was announced. He always takes the most careful pains to declare that what he knew he had “received” from hearsay, that is, upon the testimony which was afloat everywhere among the primitive churches. He was not personally one of the eleven apostles, he was added afterwards. When he asserts that he had seen Jesus, he means that he saw the vision of him in the air

overhead at the time of his conversion upon the road to Damascus. During this quarter of a century the testimony had come in, and he had accepted it as true. He certainly believed it, and gave all the force of his inspiration to an endorsement of the grand story as it addressed his intelligent study.

When he announces authoritatively, as he does in this passage of his epistle, that Jesus was, after he had risen, "seen of Cephas, then of the twelve," we must accept it as actual, with no more question, no more hesitancy, than if we had found the words in each of the Gospels. For he uses the tradition in strenuous argument, as if it were a fact.

We are not without other instances of this occasional supplementing of the four narratives of our Lord's life by incidents noted only in the inspired writings issued afterwards. But this is peculiar, for the reason that it raises some embarrassing questions in the biography of Peter. "Cephas" is the other name of the disciple who was guilty of the denial; and we had no account of his meeting his Lord since that.

One verse there is in the story of the two disciples who were on their way to the village of Emmaus; this might be quoted as a help, as we look for some sort of corroboration. It seems that Cleophas and an unnamed friend, out for a walk of relief on the afternoon of the first Lord's Day, were joined by a stranger, who asked them what they

were so melancholy and wondering about; and they all went on talking until the town was reached. They invited the man into their place of resort; and as they were eating, and he was breaking the bread, they observed that his hands were pierced; and then they suddenly recognized that he, who had explained the Scriptures so wonderfully to them, was their beloved Lord and Master, alive and strong as ever; in a moment more he vanished from their sight. They hurried back to Jerusalem, excited and keen, to tell of their interview. But when they found the "eleven" together, with some of the other believers, they had to wait, with all their eagerness to speak, until these brethren cried out first with an explosion of enthusiasm, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon!" Then they told what they, too, had seen and heard on the way.

This goes to show that, somewhere between the hour of their quiet departure from Jerusalem and their return to the city in the earlier hours of the evening, Peter had met Jesus by himself and known him. And this interesting and most important fact was already published in the Christian community where it would receive the widest circulation. While these two reports—the one from the table at Emmaus, the other from the sepulchre at Jerusalem—were adding their points of information, there sat Simon Peter among the rest, listening to

all which was said. No sign of contradiction was interposed by him; and yet no form of corroboration is given either. No particulars come out in the conversation; nobody tells when or where the interview occurred; what the purpose of it was, or the result, or the temper, does not appear. The man who could have told all that, specifically and voluminously, holds his tongue in a discreet or abashed silence. The excited conversation continues until suddenly it is interrupted by Jesus himself. The door was closed; no one saw him come in; there he stood in the midst of the company, and the only words he uttered were, "Peace be unto you!"

In ordinary human experience, perhaps one of the most awkward and most painful moments is that in which a man meets a friend whom he has foully injured, and is abruptly constrained to face him before others, and that for the first time and without knowing how he feels. If this disciple Peter had met Jesus a few hours before, and had had a personal interview with his Lord, no matter with what outcome, he would certainly have been spared one of the most trying incidents of his career subsequent to the denial. Now no especial notice seems to be taken of him; no allusion is made to any previous meeting; Simon sits silent.

Then ensued a scene full of surprise and excitement. From after accounts of it, we infer it must

have been somewhat stormy. Mark's rehearsal of the incidents is singularly succinct, but not very amiable. It looks as if Peter had swept away the entire meeting with one severe sentence; and that he had told Mark to put down that, while they sat at their evening meal, Jesus came in and "upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart," because they did not believe them who had "seen him after he was risen." No doubt they had a somewhat indignant series of reproaches of their excessive dulness; they certainly earned them if they did. But our Lord was very patient in his instruction before he got through. Luke tells the story much better. He says Jesus reasoned with them, and bade them look at his hands and feet where the cross-nails went through; then he called for food, such as spirits never are supposed to live upon, and he ate some broiled fish and some honey in the comb; and so he led the way to a Scripture exposition and a reminder that he had himself predicted and promised to rise from the grave after his crucifixion, in that old conversation up in Galilee.

It is not altogether our curiosity that prompts us to say that a proper account of this mysterious meeting of Jesus and Simon would very naturally be expected by most readers of the Scripture. Of course, the first recourse for information would be to Simon Peter himself; we think instinctively that such a thing as this would have a prominently



chosen position in the Gospel of Mark. And yet nothing is found there; not even so much as the mention of the fact. But Simon Peter delivered a most notable address on the Day of Pentecost, in which he argued, and illustrated, and reasoned powerfully upon the whole subject of the resurrection of Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews and the Christ of the Church. We follow this masterly production with eager interest, longing to hear this apostle break out with ringing words of confidence, as he did when writing afterwards about the transfiguration: "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables; we were eye-witnesses of his majesty." It is true that in the course of the address the speaker did say that God had raised up Jesus, "whereof we all are witnesses." But the final words of Jesus were exactly the same; he told his followers just before he left them, "Ye are witnesses of these things." It is to the occasion when these were spoken, that is, the time when the eleven saw the Lord together, and with them the men from Emmaus, and when the Saviour ate the honey and the fish—it is to that time that Peter makes reference; and that was after the meeting he had privately received at the invitation of Jesus. No allusion can be found anywhere to such an interview as this which Paul asserts to have taken place. The suggestion of the date is to be noticed carefully. This general meeting occurring in the evening at

Jerusalem, was subsequent to the appearance, no matter when it occurred, of Jesus to Simon alone: "seen of Cephas," Paul says, "*then* of the twelve." Now we look for Peter to speak forth plainly; we wish him to state where he saw Jesus, and what he then imparted to him; we ask for some outspoken declaration, "I saw him and I spoke with him myself!" But there is nothing in the speech. Nor even in the two fine epistles this apostle wrote to all the churches can we find one word that gives a hint of help in this direction. There must be admitted something like a set purpose in the mind of Peter, and also in the minds of all the disciples, to conceal the particulars that most of us desire so much to know. And we reach at last a sober sort of amiable inquisitiveness as to the reasons for so surprising a reserve.

Two or three incidental matters might just be mentioned here for the sake of summoning notice to the singular reticence of the disciple who was most concerned in this interview. When the women came to do to the body of Jesus what was usually done in those days to prepare friends for permanent interment, bringing with them sweet spices for the anointing, they found inside of the sepulchre a young man clothed in an exceedingly long and shining garment. This apparition appears to have frightened them seriously. They probably thought he was an angel or a spirit. But he instantly spoke

to them, saying that Jesus was no more there; he had risen and left the place in which they had laid him. To this he immediately added a direction, of the nature of a message from Jesus himself, that they were to go their way, and "tell the disciples and Peter" that their Lord expected to start away to the north at once and would greet them in Galilee. The one significant matter of notice here is the mention of Simon Peter's name in particular; an individual intimation to that sinning but now penitent man that the Lord he just denied had not forgotten him, and was still living and meant to have a meeting with him again. They were to tarry in Jerusalem till the prophecy and promise of the descent of the Holy Spirit had been fulfilled to them, then they were to go up into the north and be with him there.

Now it looks as if Simon had caught at this gracious message and gone out to seek his Master, determined to get to him in some way, and make his reconciliation after his great sin. And perhaps, seeing that his will was not yet broken, nor his vanity yet quenched, it is really possible (using Simon's words, communicated to Mark, and recorded by him as characterizing the later interview) that his Master had "upbraided him with his unbelief and hardness of heart." This would have been enough to explain why the disciple, wounded and petulant with the reception, sore under the deserved re-

proaches, would have concealed an interview so unwelcome, and even have forbidden Mark to record it, and in the end would have suffered only the fact to escape into history.

No; this erring disciple had not yet reached his entire "reconciliation." It was some weeks before that came to him, and some years, perhaps, before the primitive Church gained the knowledge of it through the supplementary chapter his old partner John wrote, and added to the Gospel which bears his name. His fellow-apostles still called him Simon, and quietly declined his official leadership. He was not yet the "converted" man who was fitted to "strengthen the brethren."

How true it is that one great sin has power to darken the career of even the most promising disciple Jesus had! How long a time it takes for repentance to grow perfect, and bring a soul to peace!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *JOHN'S SUPPLEMENTARY CHAPTER.*

"After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed he himself." — JOHN **xxi. 1.**

THE evangelist John seems to finish his Gospel, and then he quietly takes up the threads of his discourse again and gives to the people of God an entirely new story which no one of the other evangelists mentions. The closing part of the book that bears his name is evidently an appendix. It hangs upon the matchless history of Jesus Christ as a swallow's nest upon the eaves of a dwelling, not an integral part of it, and yet not unsightly, for it has in it a pathetic meaning.

Simon Peter, John's old friend and comrade from boyhood up, must have felt how important the incidents recorded here were to his justification as well as to his after authority as an apostle. And yet the fact stands, he never told Mark what had happened beside the Sea of Tiberias, or else he charged him not to include it in his narrative that he gave of the life of Jesus. The language of John is significant

and suggestive; he knew these particulars, and yet he left them out of his Gospel for a subsequent mention: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

So the question must be answered, Why was this? Something seems needed to show the philosophy of such an afterthought. Possibly there was opposition to Peter's headship in organizing the churches; possibly the other disciples met him coolly, as they did Paul at first. They remembered how fierce a persecutor of Christians Paul had once been; a conjecture might be hazarded that they remembered too keenly how Peter had denied his Lord. And perhaps Peter's old townsman and comrade may have been prompted to relate the story of the reclamation and the second commission of this loving disciple by his pardoning Lord. At any rate, here is a fresh and most valuable chapter in Simon's life, nay, a series of chapters, more interesting than any others we have read.

Upon such an addition it might have been expected that modern objections to the integrity of the Scriptures would be founded. Some of the worst of the critics have said that this meeting of Jesus and that company of disciples by the sea was a postscript

added by John because he forgot it at the time he was writing, and it occurred to him as supplementary matter which ought to be put on record with the rest. This brings conflict with any intelligent theory of inspiration; and, moreover, the working of so magnificent a miracle as that which is described must have been a fact of too much importance, and this long and peculiarly affectionate and purposeful appearance of Jesus after his resurrection must have been a fact of too much preciousness for such a man as John to forget. He was the one who used to number these events and say, "this was the first appearance," and "this was the third appearance," and "this was the first miracle," and "this was the third miracle," and so on. We find that the whole body of Christendom have accepted these words and incidents as the most welcome and helpful part of John's Gospel. Jesus never appears more kind and tender than in this chapter.

It really offends us to be told by Grotius that John never wrote the words himself, that he ended his whole narrative with the previous record, and that this story is by another writer, and that it is possible a different John, one of the elders in the church at Ephesus, was the author. It offends us to be told by Renan in his "Life of Jesus" that "in his old age the apostle John commenced to dictate a few things which he knew better than the rest, with

the intention of showing that in many instances, in which only Peter was spoken of, he had figured with him and even before him." Was John jealous of his old friend's reputation?

It seems to me that the chapter is positively needed. I imagine that many of us would have been stumbled not a little if we had found the Book of the Acts beginning abruptly after Simon Peter's downfall, and proceeding without the least explanation to show this disciple at the head of things at Pentecost, preaching to thousands, in full charity of concord with the other disciples, as if nothing had happened to break their confidence in him, or "sift" him before their very eyes.

It is of no use to mention such cavils, except to give ourselves the chance of rejecting and dismissing them. The scenes depicted, the doctrines illustrated, the manifestations of our Lord described, are in our estimation so priceless that we do not at all propose to surrender them or put their verity in doubt by a single suspicion of their genuineness. We want to go up to Galilee with the company, we long to see the dear old lake once more, we wish to study that final miracle, fully in its details, we should like to look upon that mysterious fire upon the shore, we desire to know all we can about this fresh appearance of Jesus; and our affection for Simon Peter is so genuinely sincere that we should be glad to hear over and over again the words which brought him



back to his place as one of the keepers and feeders of the flock.

It cannot be doubted that this part of his biography was what so changed and moulded that disciple for all his subsequent career. Such a man could never possibly forget it. He never alluded to but one particular in it, so far as we know, and that was the humblest and the saddest of all. The Lord told him in the midst of this conversation that he was eventually to be crucified; thus Simon understood him; and in the last letter he ever wrote he said plainly that he knew he must shortly put off this his tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus Christ showed him. The alteration of Peter's temper and disposition was marked. The fire of his youth became only zeal, the courage and force of a great heart. For now he had met his Master, and had been forgiven his deadly wrong. Thenceforth he could think of him as close by, and yet have no fear. He understood him perfectly at last: "After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed he himself." For the rest of Simon's life his Lord was only just out of sight. He could not see Christ with his bodily eyes, but he could see him by faith; Jesus had showed himself; he had proved that he was near him all the time. Hence we have no reason to be surprised that Simon Peter, like Moses, "endured, as seeing him who is invisible." It was this man who gave those words

of encouragement and inspiration to the early Christians in the midst of their persecutions. They were to rejoice in their troubles, rather be happy than down-spirited: "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

All this will come more plainly into view as we move forward into the study of the chapter, incident by incident. We need now only to notice two particulars in this opening verse; one of which is the fact that Jesus had bidden his disciples to meet him in Galilee. He had at the table of the Last Supper told them explicitly, "After that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee." The young man in the sepulchre, "sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment," repeated the promise to those who came on the morning of his rising: "And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter, that he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." These passages are both found in Mark's Gospel, proving that Simon Peter certainly knew all about them. Why did our Lord summon them to Galilee?

To the Bethsaida men — and these were five out of the eleven who started for the lake region — this was home. That pathetic little inland sea was hallowed by the most sacred of memories to the whole band of disciples. It was distinctly associated with Jesus in their minds. Three times they had witnessed his miraculous power upon its waters as he stilled their raging with his word of command, as he trod the waves under his feet, as he plucked from their depths the miraculous draught for the markets of Capernaum. John and Andrew and Simon and James had many a time fished in the coves and inlets over all its space. There some of them began their discipleship at the Master's call; there they had learned their best and highest lessons of truth from his lips. To Galilee it was fitting they should go, for there Jesus was going for a new and splendid miracle, a new commission for Peter, and a new sign.

The plain Scripture record appears to come into strange contrast with much of what the world has been accustomed to count as artistic truth. Most of us have seen the copies of Raphael's famous cartoon, entitled by him, "The Charge to St. Peter." It professes to represent on canvas the incident of inspired story which we now desire to understand. Conspicuously as it hangs upon the walls, it assumes to be the teacher of yourselves and of your children. And yet, though done by the first in reputation of

all the master-painters in history, it is a mere distortion of plainest particulars detailed here in the Gospel; and so it is calculated to mislead.

Remember, these disciples had been out all night fishing; it is important that we ascertain just who they were. The inspired record settles it: "There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples." The earliest mentioned here among these men you have certainly come by this time easily to recognize. In this neighbourhood Simon Peter was brought up. Most likely, his wife was at this very time living somewhere close by in the great city of Capernaum. "Thomas called Didymus" was the disciple whose hand had within a few days back been thrust into the wound made by the soldier's spear in the side of Jesus on the cross, and whose finger had been put into the print of the iron nails in his hands. Nathanael is there also in the group. You remember our Lord saw him once far away under a fig-tree, and pronounced him an Israelite indeed without guile. Then there were the "two sons of Zebedee," James and John; these were also natives of Bethsaida village, lying just a few miles off on the north shore of the lake; they were the two Boanerges in the primitive ministry. And at last there are mentioned "two other disciples of Jesus," whose names are not furnished. The conjecture seems

plausible, however, that they were Andrew and Philip. Now there ought to be no occasion for mistake concerning this company of seven persons. It is a beautiful felicity of speech that has called them "the Spiritual Pleiades." They had been bright, steady, brave followers of the crucified Redeemer.

Observe, next, where they were, and why they came there. At this moment they were down beside the Sea of Galilee, that familiar sheet of water in the land of Gennesaret which every New Testament reader has learned to regard with affectionate interest, every bay on whose shore has even now its story to tell of the divine Jesus, who once walked out peerlessly upon its waves, and once bade its tempestuous wrath be still, as its Master and its Lord. Here all these disciples felt quite at home. They had been out all night fishing; yet they had caught nothing; they were weary and disappointed. Vexed, cheerless, and cold, they had given up work, and were pulling the boat tediously in toward the shore just before sunrise. At this moment, when a hundred yards off, they were hailed by a stranger on the opposite bank. Most likely they imagined him to be a customer, but in fact he was our divine Lord in person. To his business-like inquiry, whether they had anything to dispose of, they replied petulantly that they had had no luck. He told them to try once more, and cast their net on the other side of the boat. They obeyed him in the

suggestion, and met the reward of a splendid miracle in the draught of more than a hundred fishes. This marvel aroused John first, who perceived something altogether supernatural in such a haul. With hand over his eyes to screen them from the slant twilight of the morning, he peered into the distance, instituting a careful examination of the mysterious stranger who had challenged and directed the cast. He made out that it was the Lord, and communicated the fact to the rest. Overboard on the instant went Simon Peter, waiting only to gird his garment the tighter, and put on outer clothing so as to be decent. Wading and plunging on somewhat promiscuously, we imagine, he at last got ashore. In a short time the others came in, dragging the heavy net as best they could in their confusion, awe, and hurry. You can see the whole group now out on the vision of your imagination, standing there on the beach by the fire of coals, distinct in every line, clearly pictured by the dawn which begins to kindle the hills of Galilee around them.

Well, now let Raphael tell you the tale. First, note the monstrous untruth of eleven disciples instead of seven; all in a row, too, with Peter at the head to show his primacy; and Peter is down on his knees, his robe trailing in graceful and most expeditiously dried folds behind him. There is no fire of coals at all in the picture. Indeed, it does not strike an ordinary critic that there was any need to warm

or refresh such men; for these sleek, well-dressed people are neither cold, nor bedraggled, nor wet. How Simon Peter, at least, got ashore so undisturbed and neat — his episcopal garments so untumbled — is a marvel. How any of them ever came to go a-fishing in such Italian clothes at that early period of history passes comprehension. Peter's coat is not "girded"; his hair is elaborately curled, however; and his sandals are tied in knots with irreproachable bows. There is no heap of fishes, but there is a flock of sheep for Jesus to point at; and the time is full noon across the brilliant landscape. In Simon's hands are certainly two enormous keys, which the risen Lord must have brought along with him as he came, the wards of which are actually wider than the apostle's sandals, and the handles of which are as long as his arms. Away in the background are lovely little Roman villages on the slopes of the hills, with Christian churches and spires — making us wonder how early in history architecture received a gospel bias in its style.

But a truce to art criticism; our better business now it would be to inquire, next, how these seven disciples came to be in that neighbourhood, and why they were fishing again at their old trade.

Now, as we have a somewhat difficult subject for our study on an occasion like this, we must seek some explanation of a fact so unusual. Most likely those other persons forgot the engagement, as they

forgot the announcement of the Lord's rising again from the dead. They were demoralized in feeling; their courage was gone, their hope was clouded with anxiety and doubt. They gave up the expectation of seeing him again; and if they started for Galilee, it was not because he was going to be there, but because it was home to them, and this life of Christian discipleship was at an end when Jesus was gone for ever away.

In corroboration of this conjecture, observe also that these men were by the sea when they ought to have been on the mountain where Jesus was to meet them. Too much importance cannot be given to the fact that a "mountain" was mentioned in every message which was sent them. They were tired, they were lonely, they were hurried on by excited imagination; they needed the cool rest and invigoration of high places. They needed instruction; mountain sermons had been part of their spiritual food; they had no business down there by Lake Gennesaret.

The other thing to be noticed is found in the expression, "After these things Jesus showed himself." It becomes a motto of extraordinary reach and power to all thoughtful believers; it is the rule of devotional and spiritual experience. It became the very habit of Peter to look for some manifestation of his Lord's nearness and will, as we have already seen. It might be well for every Christian



to use a text like this for the inscription on his sealing for constant use.

Take difficult doctrines in theology, for example. How often we have been puzzled by intricate questions, apparent contradictions, and seeming impossibilities in discussions. We have turned in dismay and despair to our little text, and, the moment we said it over, light came: "After these things Jesus showed himself"; then all was clear. Christ is the only interpreter of the Godhead: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine."

Take, also, perplexing trials in experience. We are thwarted in a thousand ways. Life becomes confused with intricate entanglements so that human wisdom is balked. Bereavements break our hearts. While we labour under these clouds and shadows we know not what way to turn. At such a moment we have often found ourselves suddenly relieved: "After these things Jesus showed himself;" then we understood it all.

Take the complicated questions of duty. Consistency demands of us some sort of regard for public opinion; but public opinion goes fatally wrong. The casuistries of society are too subtle for our acceptance. Trade is dishonest, and yet the best men surrender to its sham moralities. Many a time we have been bewildered. "After these things Jesus showed himself;" then we knew what to do and life grew noble.

Take the wrestlings of penitence in our sin. Sometimes we feel a sense of meanness in our highest devotions. Everything seems hollow in our service. Our backslidings are many; our prayers are mockeries; who has not at certain seasons dreaded to look God in the face? "After these things Jesus showed himself;" then we knew we were pardoned. He seemed almost to ask us as he did Peter, "Lovest thou me?" We knew we did love him; we told him so; and then he freely forgave all our sins.

## CHAPTER XX.

### *BACKSLIDING INTO BUSINESS.*

“Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee.” — JOHN xxi. 3.

ALL modern travellers are agreed that the best view of the Sea of Galilee is to be obtained from the town of Safed, on the slope of Hermon. The site, 3000 feet high, makes it possible to take in the entire outline of the sheet of water lying in the midst of a circle of hills. The scene is wonderfully beautiful. Each little town, each ruin of an ancient city, is directly in sight. Flocks are on the plains, boats are on the lake, mimic waves are beaten into existence by the rapid rush of the mountain streams through the precipitous inlets, but everything is still and peaceful. There is no spot on this earth more crowded with historic associations than this part of Galilee. One simply suffers his eyes to roam over the landscape, and then whispers to himself, “Capernaum, Nazareth, Nain, Endor, and Shunem!”

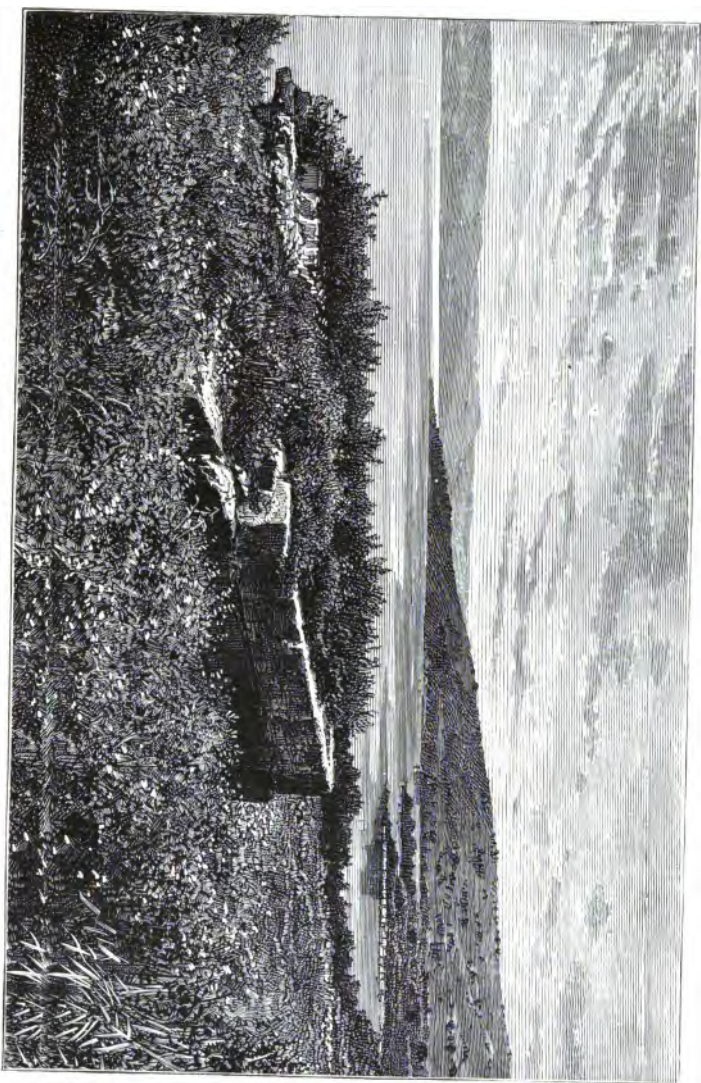
We have already studied the verse which pictures

the seven disciples of our Lord as grouped together on the borders of Gennesaret, having come up from Jerusalem in obedience to the Master's command. Now, as we look again, we discover they are just on the point of going out upon the water for a fishing enterprise. Five of these men had been professional workmen at this calling in the village of Bethsaida.

I. Our next question concerns the moral character of the disciples' behaviour on this occasion. Did they do right in returning to a business from which the Lord had called them long ago? Was it necessary and becoming for them to go out for fish on Gennesaret then?

1. Really, it does not seem worth while to combat the views of some over-generous expositors, who bestow most unmerited praise on these fishermen for their thrift and industry. When any one commends them for going about their former occupation, and working rather than to waste time, we instinctively ask, Who put them to wasting time? And if it seem so honourable for them to be out fishing for personal support, we feel an irresistible impulse to offer the reminder that, for nearly two of these past years, they had lived without fishing, and had not suffered from their dependence on divine providence; they might have learned many lessons of implicit trust.

But even Matthew Henry says, "They had bet-



RUINS OF CAPERNAUM AND SEA OF TIBERIAS.



ter do this than do nothing." They did not need to "do nothing," as if certain weeks were just to be whiled away. There was no time set for Jesus' meeting them in Galilee. Nobody told the disciples to stay those ten sad demoralizing, debilitating days in Jerusalem. Nobody intimated that they were to use up a whole week here at the lake-side among old cronies and gossips. From all we can gain of information, it simply appears as if they forgot or disregarded the generous message of their Lord, and rejected the fine favour of his appointed rendezvous, and so fell into a most dangerous mood of discontent. These apostles were all counselled to live upon the charities of the faithful adherents of Christ's cause; to accept the hospitality and help of the brethren. These were numerous enough even then to give seven simple men succour. There were certainly five hundred of them at once who saw Jesus in one locality after he rose from the dead. We are not willing to accept the exposition of this transaction which commends it as a prudent self-support.

2. No; the plainest and fittest conclusion to come to is, that these seven good men fell away from their confidence in the mission and Messiahship of Jesus so far as to begin to doubt; they began to whisper, among the vicissitudes of those disheartening days, that it was growing hard to keep up hope; they weakened in the cause they had cherished so

long, because Jesus had disappeared and they had been deprived of his leadership.

Such moods are always perilous to Christians. You picture the disciples out on the remembered shore of the lake. Possibly everything seemed to them so homelike and peaceful after the turmoils and confusions of Jerusalem, that they grew lonely and thought of old times. One says, "Why does not the Lord come as he told us he would?" Another says, "How long it is since our Lord went away!" A third one says, "Will he ever return again after all?" Then they take a walk down by the beach; they notice a boat just starting out for the night's work; somebody remarks, "How beautiful the water seems this evening!" And then Simon Peter takes his impulsive part in the conversation; you might know who is going to speak now: "Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a-fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing."

It was as if this old fisherman had exclaimed, "It is of no use waiting here any longer; this thing is worn out; we have been fooling or fooled long enough; I am going a-fishing!" No quicker said than done; the necessary boats, lines, tackle, he could easily borrow from some former comrade. The fishermen of Bethsaida and Capernaum knew him perfectly well as one who had lived in the



vicinity more than forty years. With one leap of ancient enthusiasm, he was in an instant over on the remembered thwarts in the place of the stroke-oar. Nor was that all; his sudden inspiration was contagious. In one impulse of exclamation they all said, "We go along!" So we find a lesson concerning *the power of unconscious influence* to evil which a strong man exerts over those around him who are careless or listlessly inclined to self-indulgence. Only one mere remark of this son of Jonas set this whole train of circumstances in motion. "I go; we go too." That is all there is of it. It is quite plain that some of them went, not for any bent that way, but because he proposed it. Thomas and Nathanael, at least, were not bred to the lake, and had no hankering for this sort of business or sport. They followed the lead of those whose early life had given them a taste for the occupation.

There is no use in wasting words in controversy; it is true that men are independently responsible for what obedience to God they render or what they deny in their hearts; every one of the disciples ought to have remembered that his duty should be on the mountain and not on the water that night. A full acknowledgment of this is made instantly; but the fact remains: "none of us liveth to himself." We are moved and swayed irresistibly by each other. Sin loves companionship. Peter did not want to go a-fishing alone. The social power of wrong-

doing is always the venom in the serpent's bite. Half the drunkards in hell to-day owe the damnation they lie in to the unnecessary tipples they took when some comrade invited them; they never thought of the thing till another proposed it.

In all wicked indulgence one soul often bears another right down with it into ruin. The most pathetic sight—the most pitiful and sad on this earth—is that of a young lad in the street practising swearing in his conversation, in modest imitation of his father's oaths, at the same moment making awkward mistakes in blasphemy through ignorance. So everywhere; we might almost assert that no living man ever sinned a great sin absolutely alone; perhaps he followed the beckon of some one on ahead; quite surely we may say some one followed the beckon he made himself to those who should come after. There are such things as sepulchres of souls in this universe. Over most of them, no doubt, there may be written the epitaph: "Thou hast destroyed thyself." But over a great many of them will be read these little words of the conversation we are studying: "I go—and we go with thee." Oh, would that this impulsive Simon had used his undoubted eminence of leadership better upon this single occasion! Would that, when they were all so downhearted in experience, he had spoken up brightly and confidently: "I go off now at once to the bidden mountain where Jesus gave promise

to meet us in Galilee; for I trust him unbrokenly in these days, just as we always trusted him when we were here in Galilee before!" Then it seems, positively it does seem, as if they would certainly have replied, saving all this folly and shame, "And we trust too, and we go with thee!"

But when he broke faith, they broke also. And though his wavering defection did not relieve them from sin, yet surely, surely, Peter had a double responsibility and deserved a double rebuke. For the one unvarying rule is plain; he had heard it, we all know it, from the lips of our divine Redeemer in person, and for all ages: "Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven."

3. Now in this heedless surrender nobody asserts that these men committed any absolutely mortal sin. They certainly were in error, and the result showed it. Nor need we hesitate in any alarm for their inspiration. They never claimed to be inspired at that period of their history. Pentecost was still ahead, and the Holy Ghost had not yet fallen upon them. We must remember that they were just ordinary human beings, and must be judged like others. It was a transient feeling, a mere impulse of wrong, trivial and light in motive, thoughtless and mistaken all around. In effect, it was backsliding into business again—mark the specific name of it

for your recollection afterward, if you will — it was *backsliding into business*. Their misstep was the first miserable and commonplace step leading back to their former life; but these men never took the second. It was a return to the world, however; and so far as it went it will have to be estimated as a real sin; they would have to meet it again, and repent of it.

II. Let us, then, go straight forward to the end of the story, and endeavour to find out some of the interesting lessons of admonition it contains for our own profit. There is chance now only for the mention of two of them; and they are the more helpful because they are commonplace.

1. We see, to begin with, that in the matter of a Christian's ordinary business life there is room for the vivid illustration of the ancient adage, which has not yet lost its wisdom, "circumstances alter cases."

Surely we are not to pronounce hastily upon the moral character of this action of the disciples, and declare that it is unlawful for a Christian to engage in traffic or in trade. Foolisher conclusion there could not be drawn from such an incident than that the children of God are to retire from the world and turn away from its proper occupations the moment they are converted by the Spirit of grace. Our Lord placed the seal of divine approval upon manly labour by his working with his father in the honest

calling of a carpenter in the village of Nazareth. Fishing as a trade is not in any measure disgraceful or unworthy. It is a rough business in its associations nowadays, but not necessarily wicked. We never could see the philosophical need of a fish-dealer's being profane, or chaffing those who buy of him with billingsgate vulgarity, any more than other people's.

Many of our Saviour's followers pursued this occupation in their early life; the fault in this case lay substantially in the fact that some of them felt the old force of youthful habits or of mature successes so seriously that they actually forgot their Lord's commands when they came into their former haunts; they lost their dependence, and gave up their trust. They not only turned away from duty at this supreme moment in their spiritual history, but they did not even recognize their Lord when he came looking them up. We may feel quite sure that the torpor and dulness of their sullen reply to Jesus, when he asked them so cheerfully, "Children, have ye any meat?" was owing to their intense business absorption, and their disappointed churlishness because of their poor luck. They mourned over the loss of anticipated sales in the fish-market of Capernaum. They did not know their Master's voice because "God was not in all their thoughts."

Just here is the limit for every man. Business is

all right; a man who does not provide for his own is called, even in the inspired Word, an "infidel." As long as our worldly occupation does not interfere with duty and devotion, it may be considered safe. But "circumstances alter cases." If at any moment worldly care renders our souls dull and spiritless, and especially if it makes us unmindful of divine commands and forgetful of a Saviour's presence, that moment it becomes a danger and an injury. For in the apostolic precept is found the gospel principle: "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, and the Father, by him." Beyond this lies failure, beyond it comes sin.

2. Thus we reach our second lesson: temptation usually takes the exact form of old indulgence when it rushes upon a Christian unawares.

Simon Peter, the old fisherman, says, suddenly, "I go a-fishing." It was a deduction from a long study of history and biography that led the intelligent and shrewd Guizot to assert that "men fall on the side toward which they lean." We sometimes forget that the great adversary of souls allows himself no rest. He may be expected to be on the alert till the day of doom; the song which heralds his final destruction will certainly be sung; but it is the last earthly music ever to be heard just before heaven's anthem of triumph begins. This devil knows every man's previous life; he under-

stands the weaknesses he used to have before he became a believer in the Lord Jesus. He is aware that sin never in any case touches a human being without leaving a scar behind it, sensitive and shrivelled as the cicatrix of an old burn. He looks out for the seat of these injured spots; the moment any man goes out in the cold they grow red, and Satan sees them. He remembers what our habits, tastes, and associations have in former years been, and he always plans to attack where previous attacks of the same sort have been measurably successful in overthrowing the defence.

Here now we see how Simon Peter was caught. The old lake, the home feeling, the boats on the familiar beach, the nets all ready! He wanted to try his hand again. Thus every man's overthrow comes on unexpectedly. Let each young Christian mark carefully that temptation seizes hold of former histories. We might anticipate that a drunkard would be enticed by an offer of the cup, not by the shuffle of cards; a gambler would be betrayed with dice, not drinks. A worldling is always more exposed to peril from the world. It may strike you as tedious for a preacher to linger upon so plain a lesson; but I am persuaded that a long forward step has been taken by any Christian when he has realized that old familiar sin, not new nor startling nor strange, is the foe beyond all others for him to dread. Be on your guard against old comrades,

old temptations, old habits; be afraid of even old business, if it turns you away from God.

So we come back once more to the thought that this whole chapter is nothing more nor less than a fresh incident in the life and experience of that one man Simon Peter. We discern in his demeanour the burdening power of old guilt. He is distracted with the weight of his denial of his Lord. In his soul he is still weeping bitterly. All that bad past is constantly before him. Guilt is solitary; it fixes a criminal as alone, and it makes him lonely. Most likely, Peter's heart at each silent moment grew more and more anguished with intolerable pain. Back, as he was now, among scenes that kept him constantly reminded of the trip through Galilee made with his Redeemer; thinking evermore, in full sight of this sheet of water, of the days he had spent in the companionship of that Teacher whom he had since sworn he never knew at all, he was torn with conflicting emotions. There it was that the impulse struck him to go out for once into the old life. He spoke his decision as usual with swift and determinate words, and that one speech swept with him the worried and wearied band that had lost their hold on God.

As before, we learned a lesson concerning unconscious influence, so now we learn a lesson concerning *an imperceptible loss as a result*. Jesus was directly before them, and yet these disciples did



not recognize him. It was a loss of unspeakable sadness and shame. It appears easy to find fault; but it does not become us to cast the accusation of a culpable dulness upon the group until we are sure that we ourselves have never forfeited a communion welcome, or lingered listless in circles of prayer, because of spiritual torpor and coldness of soul.

Among all the pathetic pictures of the Old Testament I think one can find no other more affecting than that of Samson just after his locks of mysterious strength had been shorn away by Delilah. He could not comprehend at first why he was not quite himself. She raised suddenly the old war-cry: "And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson: and he awoke out of sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself; and he wist not that the Lord had departed from him." You imagine the giant judge outside of the pavilion. He sees something is the matter with him. He swings his burly arms in athletic beating of the air, he smites his sinewy breast; but this can serve no purpose of good. His enemies come; they plunge their red-hot irons into his eyes; all his defensive strength has vanished out of existence and remains out of reach or recall. And the next vision human pity has of him is as a sightless drudge grinding in the mill with the beasts of his captors. There is not in all the Bible a more sug-

gestive sentence of personal biography than that we read in the record: "He wist not — knew not — that the Lord had departed from him."

Oh, it is sad — sad enough for a Christian when the Lord has departed from him, and he is able to know it, and perhaps to retrieve it yet! For then he can go, in wrestling of penitence, and seek renewal of divine favour. But to be in ignorance of one's own sure helplessness, to advance toward enterprising and spirited endeavour in the certain consciousness of failure — this is sadder still. Yet no truth is taught more plainly in the New Testament than that any gift or aptitude or ability for usefulness in saving souls or in growth of grace may be actually lost through disuse of its power; and, all the time, the possessor may be fondly imagining that he has only to "shake himself" as before.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *THE SECRET OF FAILURE AND SUCCESS.*

"They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing." — JOHN xxi. 3.

WE have been over so much of this story already that we need not in this instance go any more into details. A better purpose will be served if we use the narrative on the present occasion as presenting for our admonition three great principles of Christian experience, available in every place and at every time. These we can note and illustrate in turn.

I. The first of them is this: *the spiritual presence of Jesus the Saviour is essential to each believer's success in the line of duty.*

Do not for a moment forget the parabolic character of this story. When the seven disciples, who had under the influence of Simon Peter gone off on this unnecessary fishing-excursion, are working out there on the sea, understand that in the figure they are addressed as fishers of men. That was their present business; they were far out of the line of their duty in turning again to become fishers of fish.

“That night they caught nothing.” The secret of so astonishing a failure, if indeed it can be called a secret, is found in the fact that Christ withheld his assistance on account of their forsaking his commands. In real fact, there was in their failure at first as much of a miracle as in their wonderful success afterward. He had taught them long before how essential he was to every hour of their toil. He said, “Without me ye can do nothing.” It is a marvel that such an utterance could ever have been lost sight of. It is plain that Jesus is openly using the professional experience of those men to repeat the lesson.

In our last study of this inspired passage we followed a fishing skiff which left the pebbly beach of Lake Gennesaret at twilight, till it disappeared in the dusk out upon the surface of the water. The eye could no longer trace its course far away; for now, as you remember about the date of this incident, you recall that the full moon of Passover was nearly a fortnight past, and the hills around that inland sea rendered it shadowy, and obscured everything as soon as it was a little distance from shore. Seven men were out on a fishing-excursion, quite unnecessary and unbidden; in this action they were straying from duty. We have now traced their progress, and the progress of events, through the midnight. Such dereliction in the matter of strict obedience to Christ's commands would be likely to

result in serious retribution by and by; but as yet it had been followed only by a disappointment which might easily have been charged over to want of "fisherman's luck." It was true, however, "that night they caught nothing." Their toil was "weeping-toil," and it came to stay all night with those disciples.

Now, as we rise very early and return to our post of observation on the beach, the opening of a new day is over the lake. The grayish light has begun to glimmer along the ridge of Gadara opposite Capernaum. The birds alone are wakeful in the air overhead. The fishes have become wary in the water. The wandering lake-fowl are striking aloft for the upper atmosphere in which to enter upon wider reaches of search for distant prey. Weary and vexed, the luckless fishermen are pulling in toward shore. The spring mist hangs drearily above them. We can hear the plash of the oars better than we can see their figures or recognize their faces. But in imagination we move down to the water's brink in the chill breeze of that May morning. There is a strange form on the beach beyond. I think we shall learn before long that joy came to the lake that day before we did, and we shall discover that it came to stay, too. These men were to meet their Master on a mountain; they perversely went off upon the sea; but he has suffered them to have for once their own way, and now he is by the sea also. They do not recognize him as yet, but there will be

wonders on that sheet of water soon which they never anticipated, and words spoken beside it which they will never forget.

We have learned a lesson concerning unconscious influence, and another concerning an imperceptible loss; we have a third one before us at last, and that is *concerning a gracious retrieval*. "When the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore." Doubtless the Son of man had been there through the whole night while they were fruitlessly fishing. At once the story begins to clear up as the sky does. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." In this often-quoted verse of an ancient psalm there is a beautiful figure of speech which is scarcely recognizable in our version. The image David employs is that of one who stops to put up at an inn; weeping is personified as a mere stranger sojourning in the human heart for one evening only; the early break of day arrives, and this transient guest is off and away; silently and unseen, he has taken his departure before a trustful and happy soul has much more than noticed his presence. Joy, however, is a traveller of quite another kind. It enters, not at sundown, but at dawn; it comes as an unexpected and yet confident friend; joy is a guest who knows he will be welcome, and who is willing to remain all the livelong day. This is the picture, and a most comforting philosophy underlies it for all believers who are troubled or fatigued.

In the gray light of the early morning they were hailed from the shore concerning their luck: "Have you caught anything?" They had to reply with a reluctant and somewhat petulant, "No." As a matter of simple fact, this needs an explanation; it seems remarkable. For here were at least four professional fishermen in the boat; and they were rowing over a piece of water famous then and now for its unusual abundance of fishes of every variety and habit. They were acquainted with all the best spots. They knew the coves and channels and holes and currents, and they were as familiar with all the signs of the sky and the uses of the seine as men would be likely to become who had fished for forty years with their fathers before them. They chose their own chances; and yet they made no record of success. We understand now that divine foresight was in the entire matter from beginning to end; God thwarted them for their good.

No Christian man can afford to lose so plain and profitable a lesson: heavenly favour is withheld from those who are away from duty; God is not on the side of his children when they refuse or forget to obey him. Two words occur here in easily remembered juxtaposition: *night* and *nothing*; "and that night they caught nothing." This might be the motto for every Christless life and every Christless effort and every Christless person. It is "night and nothing" to one who is without the presence of the

Saviour, just as long as he goes on; the secret of success is the exact secret of failure, only reversed; as the apostle said, it is this: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Now if this must be true concerning so plain and prosaic a work as Simon Peter's casting a net for carp and perch in the Lake of Gennesaret, how much more impressive is the admonition concerning the magnificent work these men had been set upon, — the work of fishing for souls in this great sea of a world! We often become discouraged, for men are coy and shy of the gospel net. It is possible that we may be out of the specific line of commanded effort. If so, it will be "night and nothing" for us to the end. Hence it is that Satan is always labouring most alertly to separate true believers from their close union to Christ. He likes to create false issues, and start evil surmises, and suggest uncomfortable doubts. The apostle John, who was one of these seven men out on the Sea of Galilee that night, says in the Apocalypse: "And I heard a voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night." It was in commenting upon this tremendous passage that the quaint old Father Brookes declared: "Satan is the great make-bate between God and his people; he has a mint



constantly going on in hell, where as an untired coiner he is still casting and hammering out accusations against the saints." His purpose is to break the trust of those whose dependence is on the help of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. As the complement and continuance of this thought, let us look for the second lesson of the story: *the spiritual presence of Jesus the Saviour ensures the believer's success in the line of his commanded duty.*

The moment those disciples, looking out across the dim chill waters of the lake, discerned the figure of their Lord upon the lonely shore, it might have been evident to them that he was more faithful than they were. The fact is, he had come to look his wandering disciples up, and find the forgetful guests he had invited to meet him on a mountain in Galilee. It is now a different thing for them to fish; when he says, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find," then casting a net is duty. A man may wholly rely upon the strength of Almighty God, and yet find ample room for all personal exertion. God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon him, because he trusteth in him; Christians need be none the less active for all their confident tranquillity. An assured believer is likely to be the more valuable in every perilous exigency, because he is spiritually informed and spiritually assisted.

In the conception of Christ our Saviour, which

this narrative furnishes us, there is vast value; for it reaches every variety of heavy experience. A Christian may be vilified and abused; he has only to recollect that the Lord understands all the moods and tenses of men's hard reviling in speech. A Christian may be poor and suffering; he must never forget that his Lord was a stranger on the earth, who had not so much as a fox or a bird had for a possession, and frankly acknowledged it to all: "And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." A Christian may be tempted; he must remember that his Lord had the devil at his very side for forty days once, and knows all his wiles. A Christian may feel the deepest sense of distance from all companionship with a divine helper; but he should bear in mind that his Lord remained on this lonesome footstool of a world forty days longer than it was needful for the making of an atonement, for no conceivable reason unless it was in order to show each follower of his how close beside him, with his resurrection body still on, he was going to stand, just out of sight, though by no means out of hearing, in all the trying years to come.

Think for a moment what Simon Peter might have had in this grand crisis of his history! When

the intrepid Paul stepped forth untremulously upon the deck of the driven vessel in the Mediterranean Sea, in order to bid the frightened sailors be calm, he was all the more a master-spirit because he had his Master's spirit. He had not taken technical lessons in seamanship during the black hours since evening, and so risen an expert navigator at dawn; he had taken lessons only in absolute trust, and had spent the hours at school in fervent prayer. The Lord whom he served had stood beside him in the vision, and had said, "Fear not." After that Paul had no alarm; he did not know what Jesus was really going to do, but he left him to do what was needed. Surely he had not therefore become either superstitious or supine. We shall not err if we warrant you that, when the last dread crash came, and the terrified people rushed to the boards and pieces of the ship, certainly among all who helped the weakest the most there was none — no, not one — more sweetly self-possessed and cheerful, more ingenious in expedient, more bravely and patiently efficient in getting landsmen ashore, more positively confident that no one would be lost, than this prisoner Paul. We know on the instant that such a combination of native force with divine help renders any genuine manhood omnipotent. If our human faith could only be unbroken, there would be simply nothing out of our reach. For all the infinite resources of the kingdom of heaven would be ours.

III. To this we may now add our third lesson from the story: *it is a most melancholy proof of backsliding when a believer can be without the presence of Christ, and not know it, and very near the presence of Christ, and not feel it, because of dulness in his recognition of his Lord.*

Is it not sad to find, here in the New Testament, and actually put on the record by the beloved disciple who was present on the occasion, a verse like this: "But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore; but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus." On this very lake, two years before, in quite similar circumstances, our Lord had come over to them, and given them a miraculous draught of fishes as evidence of his Godhead. At that time Simon Peter was moved to the very centre of his being. One would think they all would have been on the lookout now, and would have suspected at least that Jesus was close by. Such a thought on their part would surely have brought them to a sense of their position.

The only possible relief from all the sorrows — all the hindrances — all the defeats — of any human soul is found in the immediate restoration of its union to the Saviour. Our sins are to be forgiven through his intercession, and on the ground of his atonement. Our afflictions can be assuaged by his sympathetic promises and helps. Our depressions can be uplifted by the sweet hopes he holds out. In

every want he is our supply. Oh, if every one who feels himself to be still out on the restless waves of distance and backsliding, as those disciples felt when it was night overhead and failure all around, would but look up and gain a glimpse of a returning Jesus, and would exclaim as joyously as John did, "It is the Lord," he would find that he was in that instant beginning to live anew.

When these disciples at last become aware of the fact that Jesus is actually standing on the shore beside the fire of coals, their whole demeanour changes perceptibly. Mysterious awe is in their minds. Deep abashment of feeling is seen in every movement they make. Nobody says anything: "And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord." The spell is broken by a few simple words from our Lord himself: "Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught." With this command, thus gently given them, our comment might as well now commence.

Surely, there is something in all this scene which powerfully arrests our imagination. As those fatigued men silently beach their boat there gleams out upon their eyes that fire quietly burning upon the sand, bearing its burden of homely fare for their refreshment. Perhaps it is well enough to note that another term is used here; when we are told that "fish" was lying on the coals, it means, as the

American revisers say, "a fish"; the word signifies a small fish as distinguished from the "great fishes" mentioned in the other verse. "Bread" means a loaf, just one flat loaf, probably, as a relish and accessory for a fisherman's breakfast. Jesus asked them to bring their gains ashore.

Now, after careful study, I cannot find any reason for declaring, as some do, that the reason for this request was that a portion of what they had taken might be added to that which was lying on the fire, and cooked in order to augment the resources for their repast. The narrative does not at all suggest that. When our Lord bids them bring forward their fishes, they proceed to count them, not to offer them for a choice. I apprehend that the fine point of all the instruction Jesus is giving would be pretty much lost if this action should be disregarded. At any rate, the command he gave them was obeyed immediately. The words were addressed to no one in particular; but we might be certain who was going to take them up. Simon Peter always offered himself as nominative case to any active-transitive verb which he found afloat on the flood of conversation without a subject. So, as might have been expected, he becomes foremost in pulling the net to the strand. Prolific as this famous lake is, such a haul was extraordinary. It must have waked all the professional enthusiasm of those men when they saw such a mass of

living creatures wallowing together on the white sand.

Thus the history moves along a step: "Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine." That word "dine" is awkward and unfortunate; this was surely the morning meal rather than one which would date later in the day; so the new revision rightly relieves the mistake in translation: "Come and break your fast." Our Lord adds his company at that mysterious feast. He even takes a servant's place and waits upon the guests he invites. "Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise." These fishermen sit there awe-struck, they dare not ask any questions about the proceeding: they recognize their Lord at last; their bewilderment is over; they know him and feel that communion with him is restored. I attach significance to the mention of Jesus' giving them "bread" before he gives them "fish likewise." For I suppose the act of breaking the bread, as in the instance when he did the same thing on the walk to Emmaus, disclosed the prints in his hands, and made their eyes to be opened to his presence and restored love.

There are sorrows which will for ever abide, unless we reach solace for them which is to be found only in Jesus Christ. The wretched years of failure, the long seasons of *night* and *nothing*, must run on; the record of successful careers must be written; the heaviness of a lonely heart must go on ach-

ing; the passionate cry of the bereaved soul must continue in its weary sobbing; the awkward, hard endeavour of mere human struggle must as ever end in its accustomed and familiar failure — all this for ever, unless the needle of our being is suffered to find its own composure, pointing toward the Star which draws it home to its rest.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### *THE MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT.*

“And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.” — JOHN **xxi.** 6.

WE resume our detailed exposition of the story. And the earliest of all the peculiarities which arrest our attention is the unusual structure of this narrative. It seems cast into parallels; the verses almost go in pairs. Hence the mere rehearsals of events appear to group together several doubles of suggestion, contrast, and antithesis; for, first, we find them startled with a vision and a voice; then, we listen, as they do, to a mandate and witness a miracle; next, in the order of the record, we learn how intuition looks when set over against impulse; and the story closes a little abruptly with an exhibition of duty alongside of doctrine.

I. Note, then, in the outset, the vision these disciples saw, and the voice they heard. We read the verses together:

“But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that

it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No."

We have commented before on the singular dullness which such ignorance displayed. Possibly the distance had something to do with it; they must have been a hundred yards off shore. It may be, too, that the appearance of Jesus was changed in some slight measure. His dress was not the same, at any rate. The seamless garment he had been wont to wear was distributed with the other garments and lost in the gambling at the crucifixion. The conjecture has been hazarded that he was clad in a gardener's costume, like that Mary Magdalene saw on his person when she made her mistake. But all that we certainly know is, he seemed on this occasion to the unobservant disciples like a mere man on the shore, calling out. Such a cry to incoming fishermen was not at all unusual; it was just the familiar inquiry of one who might want to purchase fish in the morning to supply his table. "Children" was the colloquial term then in use to mark good fellowship; as we should say now, "Boys, have you caught anything to-day?" Their reply appears curt; merely, "No"; the answer of tired fishermen, wearied with work, and disgusted with want of luck. This part of the narrative does not interest us very much, and we pass on further.

II. This stranger is in no wise offended; he now makes a suggestion well worth noting; and if we

listen we shall hear a mandate, and if we watch we shall witness a miracle. Across the little space came once more the clear voice into the ears of the wet disciples: "And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." To them Jesus must have seemed simply a stranger offering a skilful suggestion for their help in finding better ground.

Two years before this, when the Saviour had come out to meet his alarmed disciples on this same sheet of water, he advanced toward them in majestic walking on the sea. Not thus did he seek them in this instance. Wearing his resurrection body, he lived for the new heavens and the new earth; we are told that in that other world there is to be "no more sea." No resurrection body has, so far as we know, ever been cast among the perils of the deep, or gone forth on troubled waters. Our Lord came now in the way best calculated to impress the lesson he meant abidingly to teach his disciples, quietly, and without overwhelming them by too sudden manifestation of his divinity. He entered into the commonplaces of their business, precisely as if he understood all about it.

When, on the former occasion, Jesus had offered a hint, Simon Peter had entered an immediate suggestion of hindrance. It is a matter of ordinary

observation that fishermen are proverbially opinionated, and especially stubborn in the line of their own occupation. And the willingness to accept so apparently puerile a counsel as this — that these old experienced Bethsaida boys should turn around and cast their net over on the other side of their boat, six feet perhaps to the north or the east, and so expect to get a haul even after sunrise — is a little remarkable. Possibly they thought this stranger might have seen some signs of fishes there.

“Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, a hundred and fifty and three; and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.” I presume many cursory readers of the New Testament would be satisfied just to leave the story here, and understand that Christ had wrought a notable miracle there that spring morning. He had once more evidenced his divinity and confirmed his mission as the Son of God and the Redeemer of men. But we should miss half our spiritual lesson if we should content ourselves with this. For there are some striking peculiarities in the history. We should not forget that Jesus’ prophetic work upon the earth had already turned the angle into his priestly office. This Saviour had lately been dead and buried. There is infinitely more in this miracle than in any other he ever wrought. He was now wearing an undoubted resurrection body. He was a being who belonged to another world. Those

hands were pierced with nail-marks. This incident occurs within the range of that wonderful forty days which he spent in appearing and disappearing and reappearing before their astonished and often frightened eyes. There must be an allegory in the action, a parable in the picture, an object lesson for this man Simon Peter to learn. Suffer me to recall a remark made by an eminent divine of a former period and quoted before: "Because Jesus was the Word, everything which the Word did was itself word."

It is easy to imagine the vast surprise with which their success instantly found them fresh occupation; every one must have sprung to his utmost alertness to secure such extraordinary gains from the sea. We might suppose it likely that more than one of their number looked with a supercilious sort of incredulity upon the unexpected suggestion which Jesus made. "Try it, if anybody wants to; it will come to nothing." No fisherman could conjecture any difference between the right-hand side of a dory and the left, as to the running of fishes after day-break. But now the scene was changed, so that even the most fatigued and the most unconcerned among them was alive to the fact that they had made such a take as never was before heard of among the gossips of Capernaum. In one wild instant it seemed as if the entire lake was swarming with living creatures, positively wanting to have

themselves caught. The whole surface of the water was bubbling and rushing with the force of the tumultuous shoal. Indeed, with all they could do to help each other they could not lift their net above the waves; it was evident that they must pull to land before they could know what they had secured. The record does not say that the meshes of their seine were giving away, as was the case when the former miracle was wrought on the same sea; on the contrary, we are carefully informed that there was no danger whatsoever in that respect. It was the solid weight of the fishes which thus defied the strength of those seven men; they could not pull it in.

III. Let us once more move forward a step in the story, so that we can note the difference in impression produced upon those who witnessed a miracle so magnificent; contrast John's intuition with Peter's impulse.

Such a success in fishing was unprecedented; any man in his senses would have suspected something; but John was the first to discern the real truth, and Peter was the first to act upon it. John recognized his Master, not unlikely, because of a recollection of that other instance in which he had interfered similarly; but that would not explain the unusual alacrity which this disciple manifested. "Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter

heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea." John always appears as one who had the keener insight, and Peter as the one who had the quicker zeal. This term, "naked," need not be forced into literal exactness; Simon in all likelihood had stripped to his work—and so had the others—laying aside the customary outer garment, which was heavy and would always be embarrassing to one's movements in a boat managing a seine. This loose tunic-like coat he now put on as a token of respect. Overboard into the water this impulsive creature flung himself, girding up his clothes as he rushed out through the shallow depth. They were, perhaps, about three hundred feet from the beach. Half swimming, half wading, he soon came out of the sedge upon a narrow reach of sand, where the ripples whitened the sea-line, and so he stood at last with much effort by the side of his Lord.

And it is likely that most considerate Christians would say, as the story passes in review, that Simon Peter made a great deal of fuss that morning to very little profit. His headlong haste did him no special service; the others came along not a great while after him; it would have appeared better for him if he had waited to help to bring in the load. It was a hard task for them, much like drudgery; and Simon might just as well have been thoughtful

enough to do his duty like any of the rest. So, as we dismiss a point so simple, it is not necessary to remark anything except that, whenever a Christian gets excited unreasonably, and rushes away into enthusiasms as foolish as Peter's on that occasion, it is much more to edification to turn our eyes over to John, whose liking for Jesus was surely just as deep and abiding as Simon's, and, indeed, more spiritually quick than his, and whose sturdy faithfulness in duty in its hardest lines was the more admirable, in that he was so gentle.

IV. At last they are all on the shore together, and here comes our final suggestion from this part of the story. There begins to be seen now a mingling of the natural once more with the supernatural. A great hush of expectancy falls upon the company. But a common sense of mere thrift impelled those fishermen to save what had been so strangely given them. "And the other disciples came in a little ship, (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes."

We can hardly refrain from calling your attention to one characteristic result of Simon Peter's impetuosity on this occasion, especially as we all now understand he had been the one in the beginning who had led these other men into such sad business — the chief mover in the matter, who suggested the mistake of a fishing excursion so inopportune as this. The moment he saw Jesus watching them, he rushed



ashore and left to his comrades the entire task, under the circumstances neither welcome nor easy, of dragging in their spoil by themselves, without care from him. Have you never observed how ring-leaders in wrong always try and generally manage to evade blame and elude law in the moment of discovery? Simon Peter went out of that boat as coolly as if it had not been he at all who had said first, "I go a-fishing." He comes out upon the shore looking as meek and unconcerned as the woman mentioned in the Book of Proverbs, who "eateth and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness." We shall see whether he escaped censure or not.

We close our present study of the story with a single suggestion which comes to us from the manifestly magnificent result of obedience to what must have seemed to the disciples a most absurd command; duty and doctrine have come together, and great success is the achievement. It may seem foolish to insist upon this variation of form in fishing; but surely it would not be wise to pass roughly by the fact that Jesus told them to pull the net in, drag it across the boat, and give it to the water again on the other side, when all that could possibly be necessary to his miracle was to tell them to try the cast once more anywhere. Why is not this intimation found in the singular direction he gave to them, that, under the ordinary providential arrangements of

God with men, we often come up close to the line — a narrow, slender, invisible line, only a step across — which lies between human ingenuity and divine help, and which fixes a result into failure or success? If we are disappointed in religious work, we sometimes are ready to fly to extremes on either hand. Why a new endeavour would promise any better end than the one which had no issue, we cannot see. Whereas the wise way for us is to try again, with just some slight little modification of place or method.

Here is a Christian, we will say, who exhausts himself in eminent zeal with some reformatory attempt upon a particular family or neighbourhood. Perhaps he had better shift his ground, and begin again with the next block or the next street. Here is another Christian who grows discouraged over a specific class in one of the schools. It is mere petulance to throw up the work; let him begin with a new half-dozen of pupils or seek some slightly new fashion of teaching. No fact remains better attested in all history of doing good to men than that many a faithful worker has found at last all on a sudden what was his long serious mistake, and learned, in just one moment of disclosure, the entire secret of success. Christ would give him the miracle if only he would cast from a new side of the boat, even in old familiar waters.

Two miraculous draughts of fishes are on record,

both of them in this inland Sea of Galilee. In each of these our friend Simon Peter is conspicuously concerned. On the first occasion he received his official commission as an apostle, and was told he was thereafter to be for ever a fisher of men. On this occasion, as we have seen, he seems in lamentable measure to have quite forgotten his old lesson. So the second miracle is of the same general character, and has the same purpose, namely, the restoration of the man to his office and the renewal to him of his unalterable responsibility; it would remind him of the old one, and it would call him back to the work Christ had laid out for him to do for the remainder of his mortal career. We are to look, then, for analogies which will suggest the saving of human souls, and the figure is repeated. There need be no straining after fanciful particulars in the investigation; for everything is plain from the very start.

The net symbolizes the Church; that it receives "great fishes" means that there is room for intellectual, powerful, mighty people in it, as well as the poor, the weak, and the humble among men. So novel a yield, so extraordinary, so inexplicable at the simplest command of Jesus to cast upon the right side of the boat, teaches the immense increase of converts the moment the divine counsel is obeyed, and the divine means of grace are employed; for then divine co-operation is certainly secured. That

this seine remained unbroken signifies that the organizations Christ has himself established are enough for our need.

We can force nothing out of the specific number; it must be the act of numbering which is significant. This yields itself at once to our minds and is full of suggestion. It settles the fact that God regards every single soul as worth a careful registration. An individual conversion is one of the momentous events in human history which enters itself in the record-books of eternity. We find this thought repeated in its exact form in an ancient song of the temple service. It is one of the most striking and familiar expressions of Psalm lxxxvii. which is in our modern hymn, "Glorious things of thee are spoken." That begins with the praise of the Church: "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." We ask instantly, What is it that is spoken? Then comes the answer, "And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest himself shall establish her." The glory of the Church on earth is found in the fact that it is the birthplace of souls. But the main point of notice in the psalm is the announcement of an enumeration, "This and that man," as if souls were reckoned and registered one by one; the words are: "The Lord shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there."

I take it this is the lesson of the story before us.

Jesus is teaching the disciples, as they number the fishes they bring ashore in the net, that *the Lord counts*. He who is a true believer, whose sins are forgiven, whose life is love, need never fear he is going to be in his work and humble service forgotten. So we may take courage. Every Christian whose patient effort leads even one more human being to the cross of Christ, or who by divine blessing adds one more redeemed soul to the chosen of God, can be sure that his labour is not lost, his zeal is not unnoticed, the affection he bears for his Master will not go unrewarded; everything is kept on the record; *the Lord counts*.

A single expression more needs to be touched, because it affords a fresh illustration of the orderly record in God's books; he seems to keep counting and preserving accurate enumerations. We have heard of the first miracle, it was noted as "the beginning of miracles"; then a new entry is found on another occasion, and note is set down of "the second miracle that Jesus did"; and now we have a reference to this as in its order of appearances and wonders too: "This is now the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead."

The grand admonition of all this part of the chapter cannot be mistaken. We need John's penetration in discovering the absent Christ as he comes graciously seeking his wandering children, and Simon

Peter's zeal in hurrying to get to him. For without his presence and favour we can neither work nor live. Possibly some of us have grown discouraged in effort; manifestly the Lord has departed from us, and we have only just begun to find it out. Sit down tranquilly and try to remember where it was he told you he would meet you again. Seek him earnestly in the way of duty and devotion. He is sure to be only a little way out of sight, but never out of hearing. We must be at one with him, or our spiritual life will die and all endeavours will fail.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *THE FIRE OF COALS.*

"As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread."—JOHN **xxi.** 9.

HERE in the sacred story we meet the account of a most mysterious fire found on the shore of Lake Gennesaret on the occasion of the second draught of fishes, the sight of which these surprised disciples met immediately on landing. Is this portion of the narrative spiritually significant? Is there any real instruction in it? Or is it only a mere circumstance—a casual accessory to what rhetoricians would call the verisimilitude or naturalness of the recital? And so shall we just pass it by in study?

Let no solicitude be alarmed at a proposal like this. We frankly admit we see nothing to be frightened about, even if the supposition be admitted as true. For there is an old quaint rule of composition which would have a homely help to offer in such a case: "Comparisons never should come in on all fours." Inspiration would not

suffer, if we should be satisfied to let it rest, so that this lonely fire on the shore had no gospel purpose or meaning beyond furnishing a graphic or picturesque liveliness to the Scripture record.

But then there was fish upon the coals; our Lord invited those astonished men to "come and dine"; they sat down around that lurid little centre of warmth and refreshment; they left to their Master the office of serving them at meat: "Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise." A most momentous conversation arose. The very attitude and appearance of the group indicate something more than usual. They cannot be familiar with each other. They are evidently awe-struck and solemn, not to say a little alarmed. They have not even courage to put questions. There they sit, radiant in the shining of that ineffable Presence which was their joy.

I seriously doubt whether any other scene in all the New Testament arrests the imagination more powerfully than that which uplifts itself upon our vision as we continue to look. The sun begins to rise richly over the hills of Galilee, until the red light of the coals sinks away in the ashes. The children of the bride-chamber had no fasting while that celestial Bridegroom was with them. Overpowered by his mysterious majesty, they yet must have been filled with his love. Our concern is still with this fire. Who kindled it? What was



it kindled for? Whence came the fish that lay on it?

No man can deny the strange fascination it offers as we think of it. Our own experience comes into play. Out on some lake in the night-time, we may have had our curiosity awakened by a lonely fire in the distance. Perhaps we rowed nearer the shore, to see what it meant. Possibly we caught glimpses of the shadowy men who passed to and fro in the gloom around it. Leaves overhead were weird and phantom-like as they shook in the glow of the flame. Long lines of luminous radiance quivered across the ripples, clear up to our boat-side. Such a spectacle is one of the familiar remembrances of night-fishing. It always proves human presence and human intelligence. Man is the only animal on this planet who cooks his food. Odd fact is that—that civilization and luxury may be traced by skill in the kitchen. So a fire on the shore always provokes the question among the oarsmen, “Who do you suppose it is out there?”

Of course, in this case the conjecture would immediately occur to you—these disciples built this fire of coals before they started, and left it waiting for their return.

Still, you would have to remember that they set out from Capernaum or near by. The villages in that region came clear down upon the beach. What should they camp out for when so close to a cover?

That was where Simon Peter used to live. You remember his wife's mother was once sick there of a fever. And John and Andrew came from Bethsaida, not far off. All these fishermen were among old friends. And, moreover, the fire would burn out long before the night was over, to say nothing of the work it would make with the valuable fish lying upon it.

Nor would you be any better satisfied with the supposition that Simon Peter, who came ashore earliest, had hurried, at a suggestion of Jesus, to prepare a morning meal; and that his were the hands which threw these embers together.

For he had no time to do it. They were only a hundred yards away when he left them, and he could not walk much faster than they could row. And where did the fish come from? He did not bring it along, nor did he have any bread to put with it. Nor, if the whole truth comes out, was his person just dry enough for hasty fire-building. And then I may as well tell you now as any time that this was not a fire of wood or brush, but distinctly called "a fire of coals"—the word is *anthrakian*; our word "anthracite" is derived from it. It was doubtless made of charcoal, and had quieted down into fit embers. And you will hardly thank the commentator who made the absurd suggestion that Peter set it going.

It was a possible thing, to be sure, that other fisher-

men had on the same errand been there before the company arrived, and had left the fire behind them, but this conjecture gives no satisfaction.

It seems likely the disciples had taken a wide sweep during that long, weary night. It fits our quiet conception of the story better to suppose they had come quite across the lake, and now were on the eastern shore somewhere. That tract was uninhabited in spots. They would want some refreshment before the heavy pull over the water to return the boat. Other luckless men may have had a similar experience. But really, knowing the frugal habits of such people, it does not seem to us that they would leave fish on the coals, and bread, too, in such a wasteful way.

Why not come straight to the inevitable conclusion that Jesus himself created the whole heap of fire, fish, and bread by miracle? Surely one miracle is no more difficult to work than another; and certainly we have one already facing us in the firelight of that remarkable morning.

It happens that there is recorded a very interesting confirmation of this view in one of the stories of the Old Testament, which also relieves us of all thought of irreverence. You will recall the incident in the life of the prophet Elijah. Pursued by his enemies, he once became utterly discouraged, and laid himself down under a tree to die. He did not die, he fell asleep — which was more to the point.

The Lord had something yet for him to do. He might have said as the saintly Whitefield did long afterward, "I am immortal till my work is done." But some measures on the human side were needed to be taken. He was simply exhausted from want of food, and from over-anxiety. He must have refreshment, and he must have sympathy. The Almighty gave him physical help first—a wise thing to do. "And as he lay and slept under a juniper-tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God."

Of course, you know that he who is here called an "angel" was Jehovah himself. In the Old Testament, all the way through, this Being appeared on sublime occasions. The "Angel of the Lord" was the Second Person in the adorable Trinity—who afterward became Jesus, the Christ of God, the Immanuel of the New Testament. Here he provides a mysterious feast for his weary servant by a magnificent miracle. If he could do such a thing

once, there is no impropriety in presuming he could do it again in a like exigency.

Possibly it may relieve some over-sensitive minds to assume that our Saviour did this act through second causes, if they think it demeans him to be concerned in such menial errands as laying a fish on embers. We have no fault to find with any devout commentator who prefers to think it is "more decorous to introduce the service of the ever-ready angels." All that we insist upon is, that the fire as well as the food must have been provided from the divine bounty.

Now I do not turn away from the demand which you press after such a conclusion as this. If there was a miracle wrought in this thing, then it must have had a worthy purpose. That leads us to a second question. For what was this fire kindled — to what end was this food furnished?

Anybody could answer at once so far as this, at least: it may have been intended to relieve the first wants of a body of fishermen, famished, cold, and weary, who had been out all night on the lake. We are not going to rest with this; but we are not compelled to exclude it at all. Indeed, we remember that close by here — on the very shore — not a half-mile (may be) away, Jesus had once fed five thousand men and women with fish and bread, just in order to fit them to hear kindly the sermon he preached afterward. We shall find by-and-by that he had

on this occasion, too, something to say worth listening to, before he left those seven men to row home again. I am not inclined to disrespect in any measure this quite ingenious suggestion. For I think it is a very thoughtful, generous thing for Jesus to do, to provide so cheerful a welcome to those wet, hungry men as this fire and this food. I do not like that word "dine" in the story; for the word he used was a common one for the morning meal, not that for the noon meal. But I call it exceedingly considerate in him to anticipate their wants, and show that (as of old) he continued to care for his children, and did not think any the less of poor human nature, now that he ceased to wear it, for all its infirmities.

And this act gives us a homely but exceedingly appropriate lesson, in such times as ours, when reformatory and religious effort comes to be the order of the day. I feel very sure that all of those disciples were the readier to hear the Master speak after they had their miserable cravings of hunger satisfied. It is good policy to feed famishing paupers and waifs and street children before you begin to preach. When a man is lean and lank and hankering he will be somewhat more open to the truth, perhaps, if we only set him up a little beforehand. He may receive us more civilly, if we start out with something more relishing than a mere tract. That was a good lesson for Simon Peter.

We need not exclude this purpose for the kindling of that lonely fire of coals; indeed, I judge we may push the thought a little further. There is no formal statement that Jesus ate with his disciples that morning; but there is nothing to contradict anybody who happens to think so. It looks as if he did. He certainly partook of food on other occasions somewhat similar to this; and that after his resurrection. His purpose then was to confirm the disciples in the conviction that he was really once more alive, and not a mere apparition or phantom.

There is a fine lesson for us in this likewise. A great common humanity holds this race of ours. We are set to do all the work we can in the world. But sometimes we do injury by keeping ourselves piously aloof from the souls we might benefit. We manifest a sense of superiority, or superciliousness, which is worse. We must make ourselves men among men. We must come alongside till we touch. You will be surprised to see how mysteriously hard, cold, suspicious people will thaw out around a fire of coals with just a fish on it and some bread, provided we will make one of the party, and make them feel at home together. There is great advantage, sometimes, in just owning up to having the usual likes and dislikes of common men.

Beyond all this, however, there is a final reason

for our Lord's kindling that fire of coals—which I judge really to be the main one.

Your attention has been called to this singular word *anthrakian*. It occurs only in one place besides this in all the New Testament. When Peter was in the dreadful act of denying his Lord we are told he made his profane asseverations as he "warmed himself" beside a "fire of coals." You remember also that the angel on the morning of Jesus' resurrection had told the women to summon the disciples to meet him at once "in Galilee"; and Simon Peter by name was included specially in that summons. Now when we come to the conversation which follows this morning repast we find Peter was the one addressed at wonderful length. The question "Lovest thou me?" was put to him directly, three times in succession. Three times he denied Christ. Three times Christ now rebuked him. Remember also that Peter was commissioned with a mighty miracle in the line of his own profession,—a great draught of fishes. Another miracle very like that was at the moment before his eyes.

Nobody is at a loss to perceive that this whole interview has reference to Simon Peter's defection. Its manifest and manifold purpose is to admonish him, rebuke him, and restore him. In order to give the greatest pertinence and power to the impression, Jesus seems to have attempted to reproduce the



entire scene of the denial. As if he had said: "Simon, you gave yourself to me when you saw the miraculous draught of fishes; in these awful days of forgetfulness I give you a fresh miracle to bring you back; you denied me three times — three times I return the rebuke; you cannot mistake my meaning; beside the fire of coals you were standing; this fire will remind you of that; so now I bid you come back to love and to duty."

We shall touch this point again as we go on. But reflect as we separate now how the mere material circumstances, possibly the physical scenery of our sins, will help to remind us of them at the judgment. The room, the company, the forest, the stream, even the fire of coals, may come up as a swift witness to show their guilt.

No one can read this narrative thoughtfully without being caught by the exhibition of an unusual disconnectedness and dislocation among the incidents of behaviour which these seven men display. We are fully conscious of their confusions and want of harmony; things are certainly going wrong all around. It is evident that they are labouring under an oppressive and awkward sense of separation. Their purposes vaguely antagonize each other. They went out upon the water without the presence of their Lord; now they meet his presence face to face, and still they do not recognize that mysterious figure walking along the beach.

Then, again, pay attention to the enumeration of the company who were still holding together; there were only seven of them; where were the other four? Where was Matthew? Where was Simon the Canaanite, or James the Less? Where was Jude? We can hardly conjecture; probably the four men had dropped off from the companionship of the rest. Hence as we look upon that group standing there by the water, we see only what looks like discouragement and a certain sort of balancing on the edge of some decision which would be a catastrophe when they made it.

Most of us will remember the occasion upon which our Lord, while exhibiting the relations of his followers to the souls around them, is recorded to have said, "Ye are the light of the world." And then with a swift application of the statement he added, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." By the use of this familiar figure he evidently meant to teach two things: that Christians are the more conspicuous by reason of their position, and that they are the more responsible by reason of their privileges. Hence he went on in his discourse then to give a series of directions as to their every-day life, the object of which was to render them sufficiently circumspect to avoid censure and sufficiently devout to be useful among those who were to be saved.

These counsels he urged home with only one forcible argument: if you fail as the representatives of the new religious faith, how utter is the loss! if others receive no good at your hands, how disastrous is the disappointment! if the fallen world looks unto God through you, and through you alone sees light, and then your light is darkness, how great that spiritual darkness is evermore sure to be! Now there was no characteristic of our Saviour's addresses more extraordinary than their directness. Avoiding all circumlocution, aiming precisely at one point, he forced his utterances in upon the heart and conscience of every hearer with unerring discrimination, so that he should be heard.

We have reached, in our study of his dealings with Simon Peter in this crisis of his life there beside the Sea of Galilee, the very centre of his instruction. This man had sinned in the public denial of his Master. It would have been an easy matter to rebuke an enormity so heinous and so well-known, and then cast him off as he did Judas. But Simon was worth saving; yet Simon's sin could not be condoned. It needed noticing, and yet the disciple must not be left to make the mistake of supposing that this particular act of wrong was his ruin. No; he must be forced to feel that not only had he done wrong, but that he was wrong through and through. Evidently our Lord desired to crowd on him the consciousness that the principle

of supreme love and loyalty to himself was the one which had been infringed, — the very essential principle of vital piety. Peter's whole being must be convulsed and torn to pieces, so that the wickedness of his self-confidence should be shaken out of him for ever; his apologies must be refused, his testimony concerning his previous experience and purpose must be disregarded. He must learn that he was a dependent being in his penitence.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *OMNISCIENCE AS A WITNESS.*

"And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." — JOHN xxi. 17.

SOME people say that this story gives a very pertinent suggestion concerning the wisdom of preparing the way for teaching the truth by a commonplace ministration to the comfort of the hearers beforehand. It is thought to be becoming to present a treat previous to a tract; when men, women, or children are hungry, it is of little use to try to communicate difficult doctrine. Whether this is in the incident as among its practical lessons it is not necessary to settle; one thing is certain, however; the air of quiet satisfaction and repose which succeeded the repast on the shore of Galilee is unmistakable in its deepening of the impressiveness of the scene. The men were ready now to listen.

I. Let us, in the beginning, take up the question which our Lord three times in succession puts to Simon Peter in the conversation.

1. Observe the name which Jesus uses: "Simon

son of Jonas." He does not call him Peter; he does not apply to this strange man the epithet of description that as yet he had never merited, for he was thus far anything but a rock in his behaviour. Christ never did call him by the new name he gave him but once, and that was when he predicted Peter's denial. It appears likely that this form of address was designed to be a quiet reminder of the night when he proved so unstable.

There was a lesson of higher spiritual meaning to be taught him. The sun was now rising over the hills of Galilee, flooding lake and land with illumination. Truth, in like manner, was rising in this erring disciple's mind. Relentlessly and steadily that bright question was urged once more upon him. We must read over the verses together:

"He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me."

2. Notice, next, the point of inquiry in Jesus' question: "Lovest thou me?" We must understand that this word "love" means in the first two instances in which it is given the same thing as in that Christian term afterward rendered so specific by the epistle of Paul; it is the same as that which referred to love-feasts in the early Church, and is rendered so often "charity." It signifies that grand supremacy of religious affection, the loftiest style of devotion which absorbs and overmasters one's entire soul. It is not mere duty, though it includes duty; it is not simple consistency, though it includes every degree of decorum. It refers more to a deep and abiding feeling of attachment.

A very natural misconception causes many readers of this story to lose the exact point of this part of our Lord's reproof. The force of Peter's mortification and grief is supposed to lodge upon the number of times that the question was repeated. Peter was "grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?" Not so: it is quite likely that he was grieved because the Saviour in this third instance dropped down to his own word, and asked doubtfully concerning even the low measure of affection he had been professing. Perhaps a familiar paraphrase of the conversation may bring out the sense more clearly.

Jesus asks, "Simon, lovest thou me?" And Simon answers, with some humility and abashment,

"Thou knowest that I am attached to thee." So Jesus tells him, "Feed my lambs." And then our Lord challenges him again: "Simon, lovest thou me?" And the man replies, "Lord, thou knowest I am attached to thee." Then Jesus tells him, "Shepherd my flock." But he continues the question now down on that lowest plane: "Simon, are you even attached to me?" At this terrible repetition the disciple perceives that his witness is not accepted; his Lord credits him with no real love at all — with nothing worth the crediting. His professions are rejected; something must be done beyond mere asseveration in his own behalf. And Simon Peter rises to the occasion: he will accept pardon and restoration on the Lord's terms. And I acknowledge there is nothing in the Bible more pathetic, nothing more grand, than these solemn words with which a mere human being summons Omniscience as his witness: "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee!"

3. Observe, also, the personal reference of the Saviour as he repeats this question: "Lovest thou me?" He claims that the full intensity of his disciple's regard shall centre on himself. He leaves Peter in no vague quandary of inquisitiveness concerning the aim of these volatile affections of his. He does not say, "Lovest thou the cause I came to proclaim?" He does not ask, "Lovest thou the Church we have a mission to establish?" Christ



proffers himself as the "One altogether lovely," and demands the sole possession of his followers' hearts.

This new profession is instantly accepted, and Simon Peter's reclamation and restoration are complete. But he must be made to see how much it includes. The doors of the future are opened, and he is told that such an engagement means life and death. He learns that such an awful covenant of consecration will have to be sealed with blood. The cross shows itself in the distance; he will die a horrible death, just as his Master did; and thus he will glorify the Lord who forgave him.

4. Then, again, we must give attention to the comparison here introduced by our Lord: "Lovest thou me more than these?" We dismiss as unworthy of consideration that weak interpretation which imagines this word "these" refers to the fishes lying on the shore. We have no idea that Jesus turned around from the fire of coals beside which they sat, and pointed to the heap of wallowing gains from the net, and then asked, "Simon, do you love me more than property, more than what you have caught and could now sell in the exercise of your old trade?" That is puerile and undignified. The word "these" refers to the other disciples sitting in the little circle with them: "Do you love me more devotedly than these men do—these men over whom you once boasted?"

5. So we see at once the pertinency of the question. It is more reminiscent than prospective. Consider the particulars of this scene. Recollect that the last time Peter had met the glance of that eye into which he was now looking was when he was in Caiaphas' palace, standing by a fire of coals—and now he is by a fire of coals; and these special mentions of a fire of coals—represented in the Greek by the word *anthrakian*—are the only instances in the Bible. The word *anthrax* is employed, however, in the Epistle to the Romans, and this is from the same general root; and its equivalent in the Hebrew tongue occurs very frequently, *gacheleth*, so that we may say that these terms are practically interchangeable. At any rate, what is indicated here as a fuel, the substance burning into embers for cooking the fish, can be nothing more nor less than charcoal, or the live coals from a wood fire. Mineral coal is still a thing of uncommon use or knowledge in the Eastern world, except on the great steamers. Charcoal is the “coal” of Oriental commerce; it is made and employed everywhere, and is sold by measurement in weight. Upon these smouldering embers the bread or loaf of the Arabs is baked, either on a pan or a piece of metal; sometimes we have seen a rounded stone heated by the fire placed beneath it; ashes are laid over the coals themselves, and then the food lies on the layer.

What appears to me the likeliest of all is this: Jesus is reproducing the old scene in order to give force to the admonition contained in his question, "Lovest thou me?" The singling out of this disciple is significant. Beside that fire of coals in the former instance the Lord "turned and looked upon Peter"; what Peter was doing then was swearing to a plain denial of ever having known him at all. So we infer a definite connection between that incident and this: three several denials, so now three repetitions of the question. This meeting is a sequence of that, and joins right on after that. And we recall that when Simon was warned against that awful sin of his he had said, with a wild bravado of conceit, "Though all men should forsake thee, yet will not I." And Jesus means to have him say whether that has proved true.

So we observe that there is in all the conversation beside that fire of coals not a single allusion to the act of denial as an act he needed to deplore. Jesus once told this man that Satan had desired to sift him as wheat; now he told him as plainly as he could that he was sifting him himself. This must be the meaning of those repetitions of that searching question, "Lovest thou me?" Thus also we find our safe interpretation of the change of words he employed. From one kind of "love" to another he shifted his ground, until he had passed from the highest to the lowest degree of affection; and there

now he made his final stand. It was as if he had reached the point where he asked the humble disciple, "Are you sure you are a Christian at all?"

II. From the consideration of the question we now advance to the study of Simon's answer, given three times to the threefold challenge.

1. We have, first, an asseveration: "Yea, Lord." That communication of "Yea, yea," never came from honester lips than it did then. He did love his divine Master; he would not say he did not. It was sharp as a question; it should have a plain reply. It put him in the criminal dock, on the witness stand, in the judge's chair, all at once; Simon was on trial before himself. Christ had asked, "more than these"; but that issue Peter seems to evade; he says nothing about the rest in any of these answers; he does not even tell the Lord that he loves him as much as the others; he only says, "Yea, Lord, I love thee."

2. And with the asseveration comes his proof. Was there ever in human history a more daring appeal issued, a more stupendous argument to back human assertion? This fisherman of Galilee invokes the divinity of Jesus, and summons Omnipotence to testify: "Thou knowest that I love thee!" This he says twice, and then grows solemn with a mightier appeal: "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee!" The man does not cry out for Jesus to say whether he loved him; he ap-

pears to burst through every barrier, and insist on recognition: "Thou seest me now, trying to make myself understood; thou hast reminded me of the downfall I had not at all forgotten; I knew that thou sawest me then a forsworn man in the hall; but thou didst see me likewise outside after that in the midnight weeping bitterly as if my broken heart was melted within me; thou knowest I am a coward, an ingrate, impulsive and wickedly contradictory; and I am here actually encouraged by the questions which wound me and pierce me; for thou knowest all my wickedness, thou omniscient God and Saviour; thou knowest, therefore, that I love thee!"

III. It is best now to move on and consider, in the third place, the command with which the Saviour restores the confidence which heretofore had existed between him and this disciple: "Feed my lambs!"

1. It becomes necessary to dwell for a little upon the language which our Lord employs here before we take up the lessons. The terms rendered "feed, lovest, sheep," continually shift their meaning in the tongue in which this gospel was written; it is likely that the same adroit discriminations were made in the Aramaic which they were talking there together. Twice our Lord uses the word which means the exercise of the most refined and exalted religious affection. But in the third instance he takes the word Peter himself had used in his reply; it has a lower signification, namely, that of a per-

sonal regard, a feeling in the place of a purpose or a principle. So in the commands; at first a word is given that signifies to supply food: "Feed my lambs." But the word next is different; it includes feeding, guidance, and protection: "Shepherd my sheep." And then, in the final expression a new term appears, "my little sheep," a name that suggests special fondness. Thus the conversation grows higher with each question and answer.

2. So we reach the lessons of this part of the story. We need a mere mention of them in order to feel their reach and spiritual force.

*The pardon of the Lord Jesus Christ restores a sinner to perfect confidence and complete favour.* The Saviour never does anything in the penitent man's forgiveness that is half-way or suspicious. Think of a joyous welcome back like that Simon Peter received from his Master!

*Restoration to purity and peace in the gospel assumes an instant resumption of duty.* Simon had something now on hand by which he might show the sincerity of his sorrow for sin and his zeal for the Saviour. The test of his character was love; the rebuke of his wickedness was a new measure of love; the motive of his life hereafter must be love.

*Pastoral work is the adjunct and supplement of preaching.* Hereafter we are to look upon Simon Peter as solemnly reconsecrated to his office as a minister of the gospel. But note, the figure is

changed; a striking symbol had, in the beginning, been chosen from his old calling; he was to be "a fisher of men." Now to this was added a fresh suggestion by a new title; he must also be a shepherd of the lambs and the sheep. The Good Shepherd told the restored Peter that his office in the fateful future was to be just like that of his Master.

Now there is no need of our dwelling longer upon the details of this narrative. Simon Peter's lesson is learned. Our imaginations at last seem to hold the situation. The penitent disciple is abashed one moment under pressure of his terrible rebuke; the next moment his face is radiant with supernatural joy. We cannot doubt that this man arose to the grand conception of the supreme honour put upon him. He knew in this instant of disclosure that he should certainly be saved in God's kingdom. He should be crucified, but he should be crowned. Christ in set terms had assured him he was one of the elect; he should die glorifying the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he had sent. Henceforth Simon Peter understood that on earth he was going to be a failure, but in heaven he was going to be given a place in the kingdom of grace.

The basis of this indescribable honour was simply his love for the Saviour before whom he stood at the moment. Oh, if one could only see Simon's countenance as it shone in the sunlight of the Sun of Righteousness then! From that day forward there

was never any defection in this disciple's life. He had his weaknesses, and Paul had one occasion to rebuke him, withstanding him to the face because he was to be blamed. But thereafter Simon Peter took joyfully the spoiling of his goods; he bore his imprisonments without fear, so that the angel found him sleeping between his guards when he came to bring him forth; he laboured incessantly for the conversion of the whole world with a heart full of love and passionate zeal; he came at last to his martyrdom without any trepidation, claiming it as a favour from his executioners that he might be spiked to the cross with his head downward lest he should seem to be counting himself worthy to suffer in the way his Master had died.

It is well for all believers to accept this test at once: lovest thou Christ? The earliest impulse of a wavering heart is to evade the inquiry in its exact terms; we choose a lower word for our speech when we make our reply; that is the way in which the beginning of backsliding may be detected. Sometimes we answer that we hope, we think, that we love the Lord with our whole heart; we trust, we believe, that our love is true; our lives are inconsistent, perhaps, but on the ordinary register it is likely that we are as full of zeal as others. Now will come the awful question once more: lovest thou the Lord? And then our business it will be to face the throne-light of God and say, "Thou art my



God; thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee!" This will settle the relation of our souls to salvation and to eternity.

The inquiry here raised has no reference to any shibboleths of denomination, nor to any systems of doctrinal creeds; it enters human life, and remains there. The love of Jesus Christ may demand the cutting off of a right arm, or the plucking out of a right eye; it matters nothing what it demands; the same underlying question fixes the character and destiny of the man: lovest thou the Lord? No mere hours of sweet experience are to be offered in reply. To have been on the summit of the transfiguration mountain did not now help Simon Peter. No impulses of zeal, no intermittent fire of enthusiasm, no devotion to a ritual of worship, no outward moralities of courteous demeanour, no severe austerities of self-denial, no genuflexions of continuous prayer, no liberal contributions of wealth or exhaustive labours of humane toil, no eloquent preaching or artistic skill in song, no animating hopes of heaven as if absolutely secure, no elevated admiration of the attributes of the Supreme Being — nothing of all this even so much as touches the question. The single issue is as clear as a sunbeam and as acute as a lancehead: lovest thou the Lord? "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### *"WHAT IS THAT TO THEE?"*

"Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." — JOHN **xxi.** 22.

OUR Saviour puts this question down by the Sea of Tiberias. He had just been administering his triple rebuke to Simon Peter for the sin of denying him, closing his admonition with a most startling intimation as to the violent death which that disciple should die. Upon this he arose, and bidding Peter to accompany him, began a quiet walk along the shore. Before they had gone on very far a footstep was heard behind them. Turning suddenly, Peter beheld John coming along too, although unbidden by the Master. Instantly the impulsive question flashed to his mind and left his lips, "And what shall this man do?"

Now, what were Simon's motives we are not informed. It may be that discontent was beginning to rankle in his bosom. It could not be otherwise for him than a hard thing to bear, this prospect of a painful martyrdom so abruptly presented; and perhaps he

really desired to know whether he had been singled out specially for the doom of a dreadful death. And possibly it was only a simple curiosity to know what was in store for this other disciple. Whatever the feeling lying behind it, his inquiry remained unanswered. More than that, a gentle rebuke for putting it was couched under the form of language employed, giving him a hint that he had for once been inquisitive overmuch as to what did not concern him in the least. It is as if our Lord then said, "John's life is his own; his future belongs to him; what is that to thee? follow thou me and leave him alone."

Christ here evidently meant to teach the absolute separateness of each individual he had chosen, in all his duties, prospects, responsibilities, and experiences. No matter what was revealed or unrevealed concerning Peter, it was not his privilege to insist upon comparing it with what was decreed concerning John; his business was simply to follow Jesus as Jesus commanded. Each of these two men was responsible for himself and for himself alone.

There is necessity in these times of ours that such a principle should be driven home to the proper intelligence and heart. The common error is for Christians to seek to lose in the multitude all sense of responsibility for their own conduct. Few persons are habituated to the conception of themselves as standing distinct in the sight of God. Their lives

do not ever seem to be projected out before him so as to be studied, so as to be moulded. And in the absence of this individualism is found the occasion of much loss.

Just there God deals with every human soul he has sent into being. He establishes a strict individualism of the religious life beyond that of any other life, in all its relations, all its principles of growth, all its outflow into action, all its accountability. To his own master every man standeth or falleth. They who measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, are not wise. Every man must give an account unto God, not of others, but of himself. If he ever puts a question concerning others, he is to seem to hear his Lord saying to him as he said to Peter in the challenge of the text: "What is that to thee? follow thou me."

This being the doctrine of the Scriptures, then, whereabouts does it come in contact with human life and conduct? The answer to such a question is very easy. It covers it all at once. It touches everything. It bears on experience, it reaches duty.

1. Let us begin at the beginning. For example, take the theories of conversion experiences. Men there are who would deal with souls in the mass. They prescribe a certain line of thought and feeling as the necessary accompaniment of every true change of heart. There must be a fixed amount of pain over sin. Indeed, there ought to be an absolute

agony of wrestling prayer for help. And then, after a seasonable delay — a decorous period of waiting in anxious solicitude — there must be the incoming of a new joy, and a conscious peace of recognized reconciliation with God.

To all of which it is only necessary to say that there is nothing in all the Scriptural history which affords a more vivid illustration of variety in unity than the account of individual conversions. There is no fixed law in the exercise of divine sovereignty. A wonderful luxuriance of gracious disclosure is sure to be followed by a wide diversity in the spiritual results. Paul was converted in the hard, fiery way; Peter came gently at a single command. The jailer at Philippi was frightened and deeply convicted even to anguish; but Lydia, in the same city, gave her heart to the Saviour without a moment's hesitation, or even one night of sleeplessness.

When, therefore, any one tells me I am not a Christian because I have no dramatic story to relate — that he passed through a series of experiences which it is evident I have never had — then it becomes my comforting privilege to rehearse this challenge of Jesus to Peter, as if it had been addressed to me: "What is that to thee? follow thou me."

2. Nor does the pressure of this admonition end here. It reaches, also, the after history of each believer. It enables any honest man to resist the demand, often forced upon him, that he shall cher-

ish and exhibit certain emotions or frames of feeling. There is no theory of religious life which can meet all cases. Temperament has a great deal to do in moulding habits of fervour, as well as in settling postures of mind.

Sometimes, for instance, we are told we must free ourselves from all semblance of misgiving, for doubt dishonours God. And so many a diffident Christian bewilders himself among his advisers with faint assurance of hope. A new set coming within range, however, makes a fresh demand; and he is urged now that he has too little sensibility over sin. He is taught to measure himself by others, and he will discover he never has had conviction enough. So he is exhorted to search his heart until he is sure he has found, or has worked up, sufficient alarm to meet the demands of his neighbour.

Here again I say it is simply cruel to the last degree to insist that those of every class and advancement and age and training in Christian career should feel alike. No crucifixion of sensibility is more painful than a delicate-minded believer is made to feel as he starts on the fierce strife after an emotion, a mere flitting frame of mind or heart. It seems sometimes as if Jesus might be imagined to speak to him out of heaven: "What is that to thee? follow thou me."

3. But, again, see how this consideration comes in contact with our troubles. Most of us have often

heard it remarked that every man is exceedingly brave to bear his neighbour's misfortunes. Whether this be true or not, it certainly is true that every man thinks he has a fair right to dictate just how his neighbour is bound to meet the troubles he has. He must be brave; why, we have had deeper sorrows than he ever knew, and we stood up under them; he must have done with all shrinking and all tears! The temptation is almost irresistible on our part to try to comfort him, or at any rate to silence his complaining, by belittling his affliction as insignificant in the estimation of a courageous spirit.

Of course, the effect of such a sort of consolation—as the patriarch Job knew to his full exasperation—is simply aggravating instead of soothing. It discourages, if it does not provoke. And the usual result is found to be that, in return, it puts us on a complacent comparing of our patience with that of others under what we claim to be a severer lot than theirs. When we are beneath the rod of divine discipline our temper is not always the most admirable that can be conceived. The trouble is apt to appear bad enough without the affliction of words. Indeed, amiability is a hard grace to cultivate under pain, especially when friends begin to reproach us. Like Jonah, we think we do well to be angry. We imagine somebody has been putting upon us. Our experience is unhappier than

that of others. They have more wealth or consideration or leisure or health. What makes the matter worse is just this habit of contrast. It leaves us in deeper pain, for there enters a sense of injury. Simon may have thought it hard to be crucified. But possibly he thought it harder that no such thing was going to be predicted of John. Here was Simon's most needed lesson.

One would suppose there could be found pain enough in this world for each person without his own aggravation of it by comparison and peevishness. "What is that to thee?" We are to consider ourselves as dealing directly with God. Shut up to him for sympathy and help, we are thrown off from others around us. "There was one passage," said Oliver Cromwell, "which saved my life, I really believe, when my poor child died; and that was Paul's saying to the Philippians: 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.''" The lesson is that we take everything as it comes to us, without making any comparison of our lot with that of the rest.

4. Once more: apply this principle honestly to all growth in grace, and you will see how much of cant and forwardness it will check in the churches. We are mistaken when we attempt to mould our Christian character so as to resemble that of any other man. Not even the most eminent of the saints was ever set to say to the rest, "Come and be like



me." There are persons to whom the study of Christian biography is a snare. They are so imitative in disposition that they instinctively seek to reproduce what they admire. And this destroys all naturalness in piety and warps the most attractive elements of character into stiffness and awkward acting of a part.

Moreover, it breeds a morbid disposition in the soul to be on the pursuit of another's excellences, instead of going straight after Christ. Some people are disheartened and demoralized when they find they have no such glowing accounts of communion with God as Eliot, for example, may have had, off among the Indians, or Henry Martyn in Persia. To all of us Jesus says, in moments of entanglement, "What is that to thee?" He bids us forsake the habit of trying to follow other men's experiences, and begin to follow him. You have read with curious interest of that famed echo in the highlands of Caledonia, which repeats a trumpeter's note five times along the points of rock. The first reverberation comes back loud and clear, the next is fainter, and the third trembles into confusion; and so on, until at last the stroke falls lightly, and all music is lost in an absurd rattle, soon disappearing in the roll of the sea. Alas, I question whether many a Christian heart has not lost its aim when it has become content to waste its energies in an unlovely attempt to repeat a mere human echo of

the Master's perfections! Such echoes soon disappear.

The author of the "Christian Year" has given us the main thought of this incident in one of the fine poems by which he has enriched the Church over the world. We may fitly close our study with its verses: —

"Lord, and what shall this man  
do?"

Ask'st thou, Christian, for thy  
friend?

If his love for Christ be true,  
Christ has told thee of his end:  
This is he whom God approves,  
This is he whom Jesus loves.

"Sick or healthful, slave or free,  
Wealthy, or despised and poor —

What is that to him or thee,  
So his love to Christ endure?

When the shore is won at last,  
Who will count the billows past?

"Ask not of him more than this;  
Leave it in his Saviour's breast,  
Whether, early called to bliss,  
He in youth shall find his rest,  
Or armed in his station wait  
Till his Lord be at the gate.

"Only, since our souls will shrink  
At the touch of natural grief;  
When our earthly loved ones sink,  
Lend us, Lord, thy sure relief;  
Patient hearts, their pain to see,  
And thy grace, to follow thee."

"Follow thou me!" With these words the gospel story of Simon is supposed to close. He has received again his apostolic commission, and the brethren are beginning to call him "Peter" once more. We have nothing left to study concerning him specially. This little sentence, the motto of all this disciple's later life, is most likely the last thing he heard from the lips of his Lord. Our final vision of him personally is this which has now passed in review. He begins his "following," as he moves slowly and thoughtfully along the shore.

He changes characteristics rapidly from that moment. Indeed, it would be likely that a man would grow more serious after he had come to know that he was to be crucified in the end of his career. The shadows of the day were at the time falling upon the silent group. Such an experience as he laid up in his mind that afternoon would show its weight in his behaviour as a matter of permanent result. Three times he had denied his Lord, and three times Jesus had forgiven him, reinstated him, and renewed openly the charge of organizing the Church and admitting the Gentiles. Never has a voice been raised, either of surprise or objection, against that instant conspicuousness this restored man assumed in the work preparatory to Pentecost. The whole company of believers gave him his place.

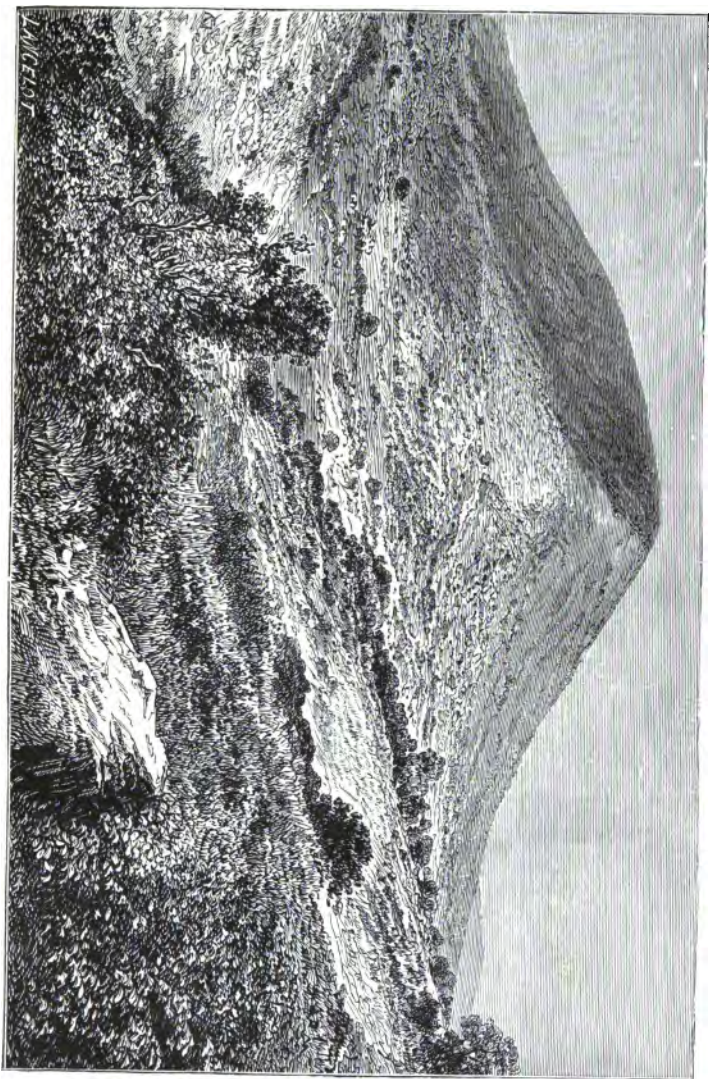
## CHAPTER XXVI.

### *THE WARRANT FOR THE WORLD'S EVANGELIZATION.*

"And Jesus came, and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."—MATTHEW xxviii. 18.

EVENTS hurry now, and the records in the Gospels and in the commencement of the Acts of the Apostles are correspondingly scant. When we catch a fresh glimpse of that group which passed so mysteriously away from our sight up from the beach of the Sea of Galilee, they stand upon the "mountain" to which they had been summoned long ago, and with them is the risen Redeemer. Now "five hundred brethren" more see him, and become witnesses of the sufferings of Christ and also partakers of the glory afterwards to be revealed. This mountain was in Galilee; it seems quite likely it was Mount Tabor, where tradition has long located the Transfiguration; but the name of it is not mentioned.

There was made the proclamation of the King of the kingdom which was to have no end. On that spot of earth where Immanuel had displayed his Sonship, with Moses and Elijah beside him, where



MOUNT TABOR.



the Gospel took rank with the Law and the Prophets, was the Last Commission given with the Great Promise to sanction its success. Simon Peter was there with the memories in his heart of what he had seen when he was with his divine Master "in the holy mount," and there came to him such a voice from the excellent glory. That spectacle must have been full of exhilarating joy and enthusiasm. A Master of the world was present in a resurrection body. The "eleven" were probably all included in the company. Around them were assembled five hundred believers for an audience; the primitive Church, in its first demonstration, gathered about its Head.

Such a scene must have particularly swayed and moulded the official policy and character of Simon Peter, now the veritable "Rock." A clear revelation of his duty was now made, and his Lord had given full assurance that all power in heaven and earth was pledged to his aid in performing it. And then he stood awestruck with the rest while those great words shook the universe: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

The discourse, of which the verse we have quoted is only a part, was evidently designed to establish the whole body of disciples in the faith concerning the final triumph of the Church in the world. Christ evolves the thought that his gospel must be preached of right; and for this reason he claimed that it should be received, not alone because a dying world needed it, but because the world was his.

We choose in this part of our work only one point of doctrine as the theme of discussion: Christ's power the ground of each Christian's duty at the present day, and the pledge of the gospel's final success.

Let us inquire in the outset concerning the source of that power which in this extraordinary sentence Jesus Christ claimed to wield. A distinct significance is disclosed in the use of the word "given"; for it shows that this power was received from outside; there was a season when Jesus, although the very Son of God, did not have it. It was, so we necessarily infer, the delegated exercise of another's prerogative.

By whom, then, was it given? The answer to such a question must be reached immediately: he gave the power who owned it. So Jesus said, "All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him."



There is nothing more observable in the sacred history than that care which our Lord took to preserve the distinctness of his own official relationship to his Father in the adorable Godhead. Asseverating boldly and persistently that he and the Father were one, he yet, never so much as once, confounded his personality with his Father's; he gave no intimation, either on purpose or by mistake, that the Son could become the Father, or the Father become the Son. Substantially equal in every respect, he was officially subordinate, and he always spoke cautiously and clearly so as not to confound the personalities or bewilder the relations of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. When he says before that vast audience that all power had been passed over to him, we are to understand nothing which conflicts with his claim of a previous equality and glory with his Father; but merely that to him in his official capacity of Redeemer and Mediatorial King all the resources of even the entire Godhead, all "power" sufficient to execute every undertaking and purpose, had been "given" freely. He did not own it before, he did have it now; he could wield it absolutely for final success.

At what date was this power given? A diligent study of one part of Paul's speech at Antioch will be enough to show that our Lord, only just now, had received it—just now when he was laying the commission upon the disciples for the Church. He

was invested with this fulness of his power at the time of his resurrection from the dead, although a measure of it had been received and employed long before: "For to this end Christ both died and rose and revived, that he might be Lord, both of the dead and the living." Let us read this passage over together: "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day I have begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David."

For what end was this power given? To establish and proclaim as the Lord of the dead and the living Jesus Christ the only-begotten Son of God. This was what the Apostle Paul said, as has been quoted. And this was precisely what Jesus himself had said long before. His whole purpose in redemption was to bring eternal life to his Father's elect. Hence the strength of those opening words of his intercessory prayer: "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee; as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is

life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."

Somewhat needs to be said just here before we move on, concerning the subordination of the power Jesus received, and concerning the ultimate disposal of it, when the grand purpose of its exercise is gained. The mysterious relations between the Persons of the Trinity need by no means to come into any further discussion. All that will be required, in order to our intelligent understanding of the point in hand, is easily to be found in the statement that these relations are in no measure or manner altered by this delegation of authority unto Christ.

Let us accept the thought that, for this dispensation of supreme grace on the earth, Jesus Christ is King. He was the one whom Jehovah set "upon the holy hill of Zion." The First Person in the Trinity has been sovereignly pleased to delegate to the Second Person full princeship over this revolted human race for its redemption and restoration. In proof of this we need only to quote Jesus' own words spoken earlier: "Then answered Jesus, and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and he will show him greater works

than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."

Of course, the main statement here is that "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Dean Alford says that this significant word "judgment," taken in its connection, means "the power of bestowing everlasting life." Jesus Christ is the "Prince of salvation."

But still the almighty Father remains supreme in his sovereignty over the rest of the universe: "The head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. xi. 3); that is what Jesus himself meant when he said, "My Father is greater than I" (John xiv. 28). Jehovah has not abrogated his kingdom.

Let us take a modern illustration to show the posture of affairs more plainly. Suppose the Dominion of Canada were to rise against the British Crown. The Queen, one may imagine, commits the suppression of the rebellion to her first-born son, the Prince of Wales—to him wholly, to him alone. She still continues to be the sovereign of all that is outside of this insurrectionary province of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Empress of India; but the

Canadians are to be dealt with by her son. So in effect she says: "You may have all the imposts, the customs, and revenues of Canada; you may have all the armies, the forts, and garrisons of that dominion. And beyond this I will pledge to you, in so far as you need it, all the power and resources of the Empire of Great Britain for the complete and rapid subjugation of that disobedient province. That is to say, you shall act in the place of the Crown to the residents there; you shall be the 'Prince of Canada' hereafter. For the Queen loves her son, and has given all things into his hand."

Now is not that precisely what Jesus Christ has been represented as saying in explanation of this wonderful transfer of power to him by his Father in the management of our rebel race? "The Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into his hand." So, then, all that the word of inspiration has to say further refers to the fact that, after a while, this delegated power of the Redeemer returns to him from whom it came. It is to be surrendered when it is no longer needed or wished, because of having served and secured its end. Then Christ is to become once more what he was in that ageless eternity, when he lived "as one brought up" with his Father, having his "delights with the sons of men" (Prov. viii. 22-31). We can understand that the Monarch of the universe may say to him: "I give you the world that you shall subdue it to obedi-

ence; you can wield all its resources; and I pledge to you heaven also, in so far as you need more help, for this enterprise of complete redemption of the fallen race of men; but I yet hold the stars, and still rule the angels, and expect to govern the universe at large supremely; and at the last the pre-eminence must come back wholly to me." Thus the war between Immanuel and Satan will proceed. One foe after another will yield, until finally the last one is put under the Messiah's feet. "Then cometh the end;" then Christ will deliver up the kingdom to his Father, "that God may be all in all." A silent moment more, and then even death and hell will be cast into the "lake of fire," and this cruel war will be over — thank God!

It does not seem possible to finish what one would naturally desire to say, and I close this study with a single inference.

We see the positive certainty of this world's conversion to God. The industrious "stone" that Daniel saw in his vision is sure to "fill the whole earth." I prefer to follow out the figure already employed. There is something mysteriously grand in this notion of bending all of the resources of an invisible and inexhaustible universe to effect the spiritual redemption of men, women, and children. It shows that Jesus Christ was well supported when he came forth to do his Father's work.

A mere earthly king, despatching a prince of the

blood with such a purpose as the winning back of a rebellious province to fealty, certainly would not fail to show himself worthy of the loving trust of an agent like that. Such a monarch would not forsake his son. His honour would all be at stake; he would sell his crown jewels, he would sacrifice his palace guards, before one hair of *his* head should fall. Even the heaviest drafts on his treasury would swiftly be honoured; seas and rivers would swarm with ships laden with men and arms. With the Crown Prince at the head of the forces, would the King leave him to defeat?

“And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?” There is infinite power now in the hands of the Captain of our salvation. If earthly governments, ruled by jealous and cruel kings, are yet so powerful in their obstinate pride, what must one say concerning the King of kings, who will be faithful and true to his own even if lightnings and earthquakes are in demand for his warfare against those that continue to resist his will!

So there need be no discouragement in our hearts; the gospel for which all power is pledged will ultimately prevail throughout the habitable world. From the early time when Simon Peter first preached the resurrection of Christ from the dead, that Day of Pentecost when three thousand converts at once were redeemed and added to the Church, down to

this day of light when a million pulpits and a million presses have stood together upholding the Bible—always, whenever and wherever the glad tidings of Christ crucified have been proclaimed, men have yielded their hearts before the irresistible power of the Spirit. This has in it the fine element of cheer and hope for every Christian worker in the field. He is feeble himself, but the forces are behind him unseen but exhaustless. So he keeps on with his task. His tongue is touched with flame, his heart is kindled with fire, as he raises the thrilling watchword of the old crusaders: “God wills it, and it shall be done!”



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### *THE GREAT COMMISSION.*

“Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”—MATTHEW xxviii. 19.

THE word which has most force in this verse is the adverb “therefore,” for it connects positively what goes before with what comes after. It is *because* all power is given to Jesus Christ that his disciples are bound to obey his command and go forth into the world preaching the gospel. “Look to your marching orders,” said the Duke of Wellington to one who questioned the wisdom of foreign missions; and whoever reads this text finds a “marching order” at the beginning: “Go!”

We are ready to pursue the thought further now, as we resume the study of Simon Peter’s entrance upon the office of his apostleship; it is necessary that we inquire about the extent of the power which for a world’s redemption was delegated to Jesus Christ. “All power:” to the word “all” there is to be understood no limit save that which has pre-

viously been suggested. For the end contemplated — namely, the subjugation of this rebellious race, and the complete redemption of the souls of believers — everything in heaven, everything on earth, is Christ's.

First, all power in heaven: the word "authority" will aid in the interpretation of this word "power"; for the signification of both has been included in the original term which inspiration has here used.

Let us bear in mind that Jesus Christ has not yet finished doing the work on which he was sent. He is still acting for those whom "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" was meant to redeem. And the language of the sacred writers, when speaking of this, is not only transcendent in sublimity, but unparalleled in its reach. Listen a moment, while the Apostle Paul prays for the Ephesians in one mighty sentence, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority,

and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

For one thing, the celestial prerogatives of the Godhead are embraced in the covenant of redemption. The Father pledges pardon to any and every one whom his well-beloved Son shall commend to him. Graces of fresh spiritual life shall be bestowed upon all believers. The redeemed shall be welcomed to heaven and fitted to dwell there. Providences of succour and provisions of comfort shall be vouchsafed to all who need them in the troublous times. Satan shall be watched whenever he tries to "sift" them. And so we see how bold Jesus was at times in his prayers. "Father, *I will* that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." This was a claim, not just a petition; he had his rights when he was plucking these brands from the burning!

For another thing, the services of subordinate intelligences who belonged in heaven are guaranteed. All the ranks of the celestial army are put under Jesus Christ's command. Hence he was announced by an angel to his mother before he was born. He was heralded by a choir of seraphs singing in the air up above Bethlehem plains. He was succoured by

ministrants in the mount of temptation, and in the garden of agony. He was worshipped by the cherubic hosts as he entered the presence-hall of his Father's house, coming up from the ascension at Olivet. He was helped in the resurrection by the angel who rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, and guarded by a shining one at his head and another at his feet, who gave the announcement, "He is not here; he is risen." It was his right and his habit to use these servants of the Highest for a retinue of protection and aid for his friends. He made them ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. At his bidding one should open the door of Peter's prison; another should be by the side of Daniel in the lion's den; three at one time should go on an errand to Abraham in his hour of need, and two should lay hold of Lot to hasten his deliverance from burning Sodom. Thus everywhere in the inspired record this fact confronts our observation: Jesus had power to bend all that world of loving loyalty to this, in bringing home the sons of God to glory.

And, most of all, the personal offices of the Holy Ghost, as the Third Person of the Trinity, are specially promised to Jesus Christ in his errand of redemption. This he told his disciples again and again. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to

your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

He even took pains to show them exactly what the Holy Spirit would do: "Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you."

Every exercise of power was covenanted to be made by this Third Person of the Trinity in a sort of loyal subordination to the behest and command of the Second. The representation of the entire Scriptures might well be gathered into the intense statements of the ancient Churches: "In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son." Under the plan of redemption the Holy Ghost was to become the faithful witness and the unimpeachable coadjutor in Jesus' life and ministry to the very end. "If I go away, I will send him," was the constant word. To disturb such an arrangement

was a complete disruption of the covenant. No wonder that it split the Church and shocked Christendom, when the quarrelling polemics of the East wrested "*Filioque*" from the Creed!

But now, secondly, all power on earth is given to Christ. Surely, surely, the whole resources of this blighted world and this ruined race ought to be utilized as far as possible in the labour of their own restoration. The curse is on all; let the costs come on all likewise.

So to our Saviour has been given supreme authority over the uses of human life. As the life is more than meat, so immortality is higher than life. The rule of earthly existence, ever since guilt entered and man fell, has been this: for everything that is achieved something must die. "Life for life:" that is the precept which our Master gave: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life, shall lose it: and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal." Hence come martyrdoms and the blood of the confessors; the toils of an honoured line of missionary workers; the consecration of the highest or most prized gifts for the attainment of even a single grace of spiritual experience; the relentless sacrifice, from Golgotha days until now, of the noblest leaders of the ages. In all this there has been no unauthorized perversion of legitimate

resources unto illegitimate ends: "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man." Christian endeavour for evangelization, in the cause and with the methods of the Master, has evoked all that is sublimest in heroic manhood. This was the primeval and paramount object of his coming from the bosom of his Father. It was first in fact and first in importance of all he had to do. When man sinned he became mortal. He was lost into the power of death. He died at once in every respect that makes death the tyrant of the race. The mainspring of his existence was broken in order that he might run down. It became a question then whether a human being should die for Satan or for God. Being the second Adam, our divine Saviour took the immortality up where it fell. In the very first utterance of the curse came the promise of a blessing. A heel was fatally bitten, but a head was bruised. The devil could not hold humanity to service. No one can fail to observe how carefully the Almighty guarded men's lives from wastage. The fiery serpent might bite, but a serpent of brass showed how the sting could be healed. Accident which might have resulted in death was threatened, but cities of refuge were chosen where the homicide might get another chance. Jesus came, bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel of redemption.

To our Redeemer has also been given, for the same great end, the dominion over and the employment of brute life. Before the temptation and fall of Adam, animal food had been interdicted; afterwards that restriction was removed, but another was added even more significant; it was positively forbidden to men to eat blood from the veins of the animals they slew. Blood was life; the shedding of blood was death; the symbolism was reserved to the solemn and sacred uses of sacrifice; the shedding of blood was for the remission of sin. Punctiliously guarded in every other respect, blood was free as water for the atonement pictured in the offering of victims on the altars. Life must ever answer for life; every transgression told of life lost and death coming. The reference was invariably to Jesus Christ, the one Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. Our first parents were turned out of the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword was set at the gate. Still they meekly and penitently received a promise of mercy at the same moment, and walked forth to their bitter toil clad in the skins of those creatures they slew for the earliest burnt-offering on the earth; they saw the day of Christ from afar off, and were glad. Hence, along that whole track of inspired history we find in the Bible, we behold troops of victims taken from the land, the forest, the air, as they come willingly up to the knife of the priest and are laid on the



coals of penitential fire. Yokes of service grew to be the emblems of Christianity in toil; true believers must labour as the beasts were wont to labour in the furrows of the field. So we find in the record that animals of every grade, high and low, peacefully answered every call to work. In the forest ravens brought food to Elijah; in the plain the lowing kine forsook their young to draw the ark of the Lord along to its new resting-place; the humblest brute is let loose for the lowliest errand, if only "the Lord hath need of him." Our common hope brings common toil.

Then, also, to Jesus Christ under the plan of redemption has been given the sovereignty over the processes of nature. This earth was in man's awful curse; it is constrained now to share in the work of gaining relief. Ancient poets used to write about a "spirit of the world" in its sorrow, as if there were a soul lying down under the rocky ribs of the mountains wailing with pain. The myth was an easy one to make; for even to a Christian there is something marvellous in the quick sympathy with which beasts and birds, and trees and flowers, seem to know how redemption is going on. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." The rocks rent when Jesus died; dark palls of gloom covered the sky when he was on the cross; the ground opened, the graves were upheaved, the bodies of saints arose, when that awful hour of the resurrec-

tion was convulsing the universe. There was need of a famine in Canaan, and a plenty in Egypt, when the set time had come for Israel to dwell in the land of Pharaoh. The pestilence broke out when it was necessary to punish David's sin. The Red Sea was rent by an east wind for a road on dry land, and the Sea of Galilee was silent and calm when the disciples needed to get ashore. Jordan's waves were piled up on themselves twice for the help of the people God loved. So it has been always: the winds shall scatter the Spanish Armada away in the solitudes of the North Sea, if Protestant England is menaced in the Reformation. The stars in their courses fight against Sisera.

And, finally, to Jesus Christ has been given the proprietorship over the silver and the gold. The lead mines, the diamond fields, coal and oil, salt, alum, and iron; corals in the lagoons, and pearls in the ocean — Christ has a lien on all these for the work of the Church. To the forest God sends us to see the Gothic arches of his woodland cathedrals; to the mountain he leads us to behold the cattle on a thousand hills which are his. Who put the grains of gold in the placers? When did God lay down the layers of fuel in the primeval swamps? How could it have happened that coal should be Protestant and Anglo-Saxon in its deposits over the wide world? The spoils of the Egyptians shall be at once considered legitimate plunder when Jehovah's people

are gathering materials to build the tabernacle in the wilderness. "The silver is mine, the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." Christians have never been called proprietors; they are only stewards at the best. We buy and sell, lay out fields and join meadow to meadow; we call our houses by our own names; we talk about ancient possessions and heritages; very pathetic are our sentimentalities about our old homesteads. But we must remember that Christ owns this earth in fee-simple. This world is still rolling on in its orbit, because Jesus Christ died to redeem it. It would have been a wandering star to which is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever, if it had not been continued and sustained to be the stage on which redemption is being enacted. It is not exactly the mystic thing it seems, to think that it is conscious of its mighty purpose and mission. "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." The last battle is ere long to be brought on between the arrayed forces of right and wrong. And then the two armies will gather upon its appointed plain with as little regard for titles to property as the allied forces had for the ownership of the pitiful orchard where Waterloo was fought. It mattered not what farmer lost fruit when empires hung upon the issue of the engagement. It will hardly be inquired whose lawn is trampled when the Captain of our salvation rides forth, conquering and

to conquer, on whose vesture and whose thigh is written, "King of kings and Lord of lords!"

This, then, is what Luke means in the opening chapter of the new ecclesiastical history, when he reminds the disciples of the "commandments" which the Lord Jesus had given to them. This command to preach the gospel to all creation was backed by the most stupendous resources this world ever knew. What must Simon Peter, and the friends with him, have thought of such responsibilities followed by such sanctions? The educating force of an hour like this is simply transcendent. Now certainly this man from Bethsaida must have appreciated what the Psalmist meant when he sang, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein." From this instant, an intense agitation pervades human history. The race rushing headlong stands in sudden shock of vibration, like some vast man-of-war with the screw in reversal and the sails pressing up in the very teeth of the wind, with the tremor of titanic forces working to save its going upon the rocks. Its strength is stanch, its resources are exhaustless, it is safe!

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### *PRIMITIVE PREACHING.*

“And they went forth, and preached everywhere.” — MARK xvi. 20.

NOW that we understand that our Lord has given to Simon Peter, as a sort of leader of the eleven disciples, the commission to go out into the work of evangelizing the whole world, coupling with it the warrant of sure success founded upon the fact that all power had been bestowed on him, both in heaven and on earth; and that then he had ascended before them, being borne up on the cloud out of sight,—it becomes a matter of exceeding interest for us to inquire concerning the behaviour of the company of workers who stood there ready to fulfil the duties and assume the responsibilities which had been laid upon them all at once.

Each evangelist in turn seems to have made a record of something which peculiarly arrested his own attention. Mark, whose account presents itself with the personal supervision of Peter, gives us an unusual number of details as to the results which might be expected soon: “And he said

unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Faith, or the want of it, should be the condition of salvation or condemnation; miracles should follow as signs of fidelity and helps in any exigency of need. Such extraordinary promises and predictions must have made the deepest impression upon the minds of those disciples.

What, then, was their conduct? How did they feel? What did they do? There remained a period of time between this and Pentecost. They were thrown upon their own responsibility; how did they spend it? The earliest part of the record displays the exhilaration of their spirits: "And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." Some of us will remember, as an incident of the Crimean war, the stories which came over the sea concerning the British soldiers who marched forth at the call for troops; some regiments had been lying in garrisons and camps, gaining recruits but growing impatient

with waiting, longing for something to do; the orders arrived suddenly, and all that belonged in the ranks burst out into song, got out their banners, burnished their arms, took the few remaining drills with enthusiasm under the hot sunshine, sent messages of loyal address to the Queen, cleaned the buttons on their scarlet uniforms, — fairly exuberant with gladness. One recalls all this as he thinks of those eleven apostles lifting every day in the temple their loyal prayers to the Captain of their salvation, with hearts full of praise and worship and joy and love!

But this was not all: they were waiting, but they need not sleep and grow sluggish; there was something to be accomplished for God now: "So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the words with signs following."

It is upon this final expression that we propose to dwell for an illustration of the earliest method of gospel propagation. It appears likely that there is in it a hint of help for usefulness in our times.

The ancient Batavians wore on their necks a shackle until they had conquered a foe. Each man must personally bring in at least one prisoner and present him to the monarch. Then in the royal presence the officers broke the iron band with rejoic-

ing, as a sundered emblem of sloth and slavery. How many of our Lord's people are still wearing the chain ! How does one feel who has honestly to own that he has never been the instrument of converting one soul ?

The primitive disciples gave their example to the Church in all ages, when, after the Lord was received up into heaven, they, as we are told, "went forth and preached everywhere." Here we have an account of the commissioning of a large company of laymen to go through the land.

"After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come." These were called "labourers," but evidently they were to speak in public ; for this was their authority: "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

I. It will be necessary to settle, in the beginning, what these men did before we can accept the full admonition which their fidelity is designed to bring to us. What was the nature of the "preaching" which they entered upon with so much zeal and success ?

Precisely the form of their occupation upon these journeys is certainly not indicated by the term of speech here employed. For it means simply enough they "heralded," but it does not specify or explain



their methods of procedure. We need to supplement this Gospel record by that of the Acts. In one chapter we are told, for example, when the allusion cannot be to the chosen eleven apostles alone, but must be to all the rank and file of newly converted proselytes and believers of every class and nationality, this: "And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus."

It so happens that the word here rendered "spake" is that which is most often used for mere conversation; yet it occurs nearly as frequently when it means to *preach*. It is found once when no other reference is possible except to our Lord himself: "And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door; and he preached the word unto them" (Mark ii. 2). It is likely that our Lord just stood and *talked* to that company of curious people, for that is what the word means. And so in this passage quoted: Acts xi. 20. Talking was preaching. The disciples told over and over again the story of the cross, and conversed about it without much form of official authority or much stateliness of gesture in their addresses.

The grouping of these two things is seen in the account given of the apostles' visit to Samaria — Acts viii. 25. There the same language occurs: "And they, when they had testified, and preached the word

of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans." They *testified*—that is, they bore witness to the facts concerning Jesus; and they *preached*—or, in other words, they talked familiarly with all they met. And this is "preaching the gospel," as the simple record puts it.

Hence, we must conclude that this "preaching everywhere" was something besides the formal office and work of an ordained minister in the pulpit. It was a style of religious activity in which all classes of Christians could engage and did engage freely. It was the propagation of evangelical truth *by ordinary conversation*. The disciples went around and talked everywhere; thus they "heralded" the gospel. Those primitive believers entered upon the solid work of turning this vast world back to God by just speaking to the person whom they met first, no matter who he was. They talked of Christ and his kingdom, of his resurrection and return, to every one they found who showed readiness to listen to them.

II. The advantages of such a colloquial method of advancing the cause of Jesus Christ in the world will occur to almost every reflective man, according to the anxieties he has felt hitherto.

1. We need something to keep us thinking about the coming of the kingdom. One whose mind and heart are full of Christ will find it easy to talk for

him. Everybody seems to know that, but how few appreciate the converse of the statement; namely, that he who keeps talking about Christ will find his mind and heart growing more full of him all the time. Thus a Christian's very presence is forceful. A nobleman once visited where Fénelon was residing; he admired the quiet believer's beautiful life exceedingly, but he said afterward, "I had to leave the house or become a Christian in despite of myself." It was only that Fénelon's sweet life was a sermon.

2. We need to have our charities for others stimulated. Our minds employed, our imaginations arrested, our tongues kindled with wise and generous speech, we are less likely to grow captious about those around us. A wasteful and dangerous tendency toward censoriousness may be detected in many quarters nowadays. We always find this rampant in the churches when the people are listless. Idle devotees are apt to discover that some professors of religion keep open their eyes in prayer-time. The explanation of half the reckless canvassing of other people's methods and habits can be found in the lazy mood and unoccupied life of a large part of the Lord's host. We shall have done with our hurtful discussions concerning measures new and old, all our jealous questions about men will go restfully without answer, we shall surrender our discouraged wails of complaint, when we just rise for ourselves and preach everywhere.

3. We need something to offset declamation. It is evident we must put the tongue at work on a good errand, or it will wag along for ever on its own. Nobody craves a frantic increase of ambitious spokesmen now on the platforms or in the pulpits. And Christian workers are becoming satisfied, as was the Saviour at the well, with an inquiring audience of only one, provided that one can be converted unto God.

III. Now, something is worth saying about the manner in which this duty should be performed; for there never was a good form of service that might not be perverted into harmful misuse.

1. It should be *distinctly religious*. Unctuous talk, or polemic discussion, or denominational criticism will not profit those souls that are seeking the way to Christ. A Christian ought to be very intelligent and direct in doing his errand, when he is trying to save the soul that stands next to him. A single sentence of reminiscence from John Bunyan's biography will illustrate precisely the distinction which must be observed here. He says, "The good providence of God called me to Bedford to work at my calling; and in one of the streets of that town I came where there were three or four women sitting at the door in the sun talking about the things of God." Now this familiar picture would never have risen upon our imaginations as promising good; it looks more like a foolish and idle group of old crones and gos-

sips on the steps. Nothing but the conversation seems to have saved it; and that gave the immortal "Pilgrim's Progress" eventually to the world that needed it.

What is often called religious conversation is apt to degenerate into mere canvassing of one's neighbours. The very word "gossip," just used, will give a warning easily remembered. What does it mean? It comes from two old English monosyllables, "God" and "sib;" the last of these signifies an alliance or a relationship. A "God-sib," or in smoother pronunciation, a "gossip," was a God-father or a God-mother, a sponsor in baptism. Thus the name passed to mean a companion, a familiar comrade. Then it was perverted to signify an idle tattler, one who spent time in gadding from house to house telling news and repeating scandal. *God's relations* must not become *gossips*.

2. Then this talking with souls should be *thoroughly in earnest*. It is recorded of the lamented Hewitson that his chief usefulness lay in such forms of effort. His ministry, so says his biographer, was "eminently an extraordinarily earnest one. It was not the strange earnestness of the flesh — not vehemence, not noise, not physical fervor — but the deep, solemn, calm, gentle earnestness of the Spirit. There was no scolding, no impatience, nor any angry upbraiding; but the tenderest pity, for he besought and warned with tears. This came to be his unanswerable argument."

3. Then, also, the talk ought to be *politely civil*. Certain peculiar forms of address are popular in the community, and have been commended in some of the centres of advice. It is said that an abrupt challenge, a sudden sharp demand, a quick searching inquiry, a shock of salutation, is the likeliest to do good in awakening the impenitent and arresting notice. But thoughtful Christians sometimes feel humiliated by the rough remarks which they overhear, those pointed and zealous attacks which are addressed to strangers by some who pride themselves upon their adroitness and courage in surprising souls into the kingdom. They feel sure there is a mistake in imagining that the more startling a question is, in some unexpected and inopportune moment, the more calculated it is to go straight home to the conscience of the hearer. Politeness is generally in order to good, even under the plan of redemption. In many instances such things do irretrievable harm. Common courtesy lies at the basis of all true religion. Tact goes hand in hand with tenderness when one is in serious pursuit of souls.

IV. A single thought more may now be added to this exposition of a golden text; it concerns the efficacy of the plan here indicated for the help of all the interests involved. With a few applications, in the line of Christian endeavour, it will be discovered that this form of work will easily remove many difficulties.

1. Take, for example, the cry of *ministerial dogmatism*, overbearance, and priestcraft. Do the clergy have too much power in the churches? Well, power goes with *activity*. Did anybody ever hear of a minister lording it over his people when all the people were going about preaching everywhere?

2. Then some Christians say they have *no time* to do religious work. How much time does it take to *talk*? Red Jacket, the Indian, once said, to this subterfuge, "You have all the time there is."

3. Others declare they have no *gifts*. Here is a task requiring zeal rather than scholarship. Ebenezer Erskine was a minister long before he was a Christian; he overheard his own wife "talking" to his brother Ralph about his soul, and that brought him to Christ. It was the woman's heart that swayed the man's intellect at last. We are not to forget that the one person who was efficient in the conversion to Jesus Christ of more souls than any one else previous to the day of Pentecost was a poor, ignorant, abandoned woman among the Samaritans, to whom the Saviour talked at the well of Jacob in Sychar. He *talked* to her, and she went away *talking*; they were both about the same work, and it is instructive to note that they did it in exactly the same way of procedure. There is not much in the story of this incident and its astonishing result to remind us of our modern methods of preaching. A familiar conversation was what ac-

complished the evangelization of that wicked city. The main hope of the Church at the present day is surely to be found in the pastor's talking rather than in his preaching.

It does not require any surprising amount of education to kindle a hearer's heart, if only our own heart is kindled truly when we begin to converse with him. Any Christian ought to be intelligent and scholarly enough to hand a tract, or commend a book, or quote a text; it is easy to tell a sinner what repentance is, what faith is, what duty is. Just a few words of direction or of cheer, spoken as if the speaker in his own person cared for him, is often all that an inquirer needs when his conscience is alive or his sensibility is stirred by God's Spirit.

Of course there may be mistakes made; but I seriously think more mistakes are made by not doing than by doing. My observation leads me to believe there is less danger to be apprehended when a praying talker is only impulsive and overzealous, than when he is backward, cold, or calculating. And so declares no less an accepted authority in everything that belongs to pulpit work than the good Cecil. "A warm blunderer," said he, "does more for the world than a frigid wise man. He who gets into an inveterate habit of inquiring about propriety and expediency often spends his life without doing anything to the purpose. The state of the world is such, and so much depends upon alertness and



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action, that everything appears to say to everybody, 'Do something, do it!'" This is wise counsel: "Do something! do something!" Do it well, if you can; do it as well as you can; leave the everlasting results to God: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord!"

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### *THE CONDITION OF SUCCESS.*

"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."—Acts i. 8.

WITH the opening chapter of the Book of the Acts ecclesiastical, as discriminated from gospel, history commences. Hence we are to consider ourselves entering upon a new era in the life of Simon Peter, as one of the chosen instruments in the evangelization of the whole world unto God. And it is needed at once that we should take the full sense of his responsibility as he faces the race, the ages, and the future.

It seems to be positively pathetic for a thoughtful man to fasten his contemplation upon that company of eleven disciples gathered about the ascending Saviour, as he rises from the summit of Mount Olivet. So many experiences are flashed upon their memories and their imaginations all at once that they would be pardoned if they should display a frightened bewilderment under such a weight of disclosure. The future was opened fully to them

for the first time; they now realized, hitherto they had only conceived. Look at Simon Peter, for example; a rough man, educated somewhat by this time in the gospel of grace, only a rustic, however, at the best. He learns that the small band of timid and melancholy workers at his side are immediately to face the belligerent world, to move the race, to defy the governments, to antagonize the religious systems, to overturn the political institutions, and bring back the whole earth into unconditional subjection to God's Son.

Now what can we suppose he, and the others, would think of this? The majesty of the Messiah's errand was at last dawning upon their intelligence; Christ had come, but he was going away; the purpose still remained unaccomplished; they were informed that they themselves would have everything hereafter upon their own hands. What could they do?

A single reminiscence of their Lord's teaching must have come to them all; for Jesus had said the words quite lately, no longer ago indeed than the day when he was talking at the table of the Last Supper: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." This promise had not been altogether clear to some of them when Christ had given it; but among the eleven now left

of the twelve there was an anxious man who had taken upon himself to question his Master further. "Judas saith unto him (not Iscariot), Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The philosophy of this explanation may still have been obscure, but an important fact was made perfectly clear; and that was all they needed. Jesus Christ covenants to each genuine Christian who is faithful in an extreme exigency of need, that he will make to him a personal disclosure of himself, which as a reinforcement shall abide ever after in his soul; and this will be his dependence in whatever stress he shall be.

This engagement was repeated when the great commission was given to those whose office now it was to turn the world upside down. Jesus said, as he stood there in his resurrection body on Mount Olivet, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." If there yet in their minds remained any sense of oppressive mystery, it was relieved, so we suppose, by the subsequent announcement and imperative command: "And being assembled together with them commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he,

ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

From this it appears that the apostles were bidden to stay within the precincts of the holy city until a supreme manifestation of the Third Person in the Godhead should make his conspicuous advent. While they waited, they had only their previous instruction and training upon which they could fall back for wisdom; they were not inspired, only educated by what they had been taught. It was even possible for plans to be made and actions to be taken which would have to be disowned afterwards by new revelations of the Lord's will concerning the Church.

So we need not be surprised if we shall find in our further historic studies that this early period of organization needs to be examined with some caution as to the precedents apparently set. The apostles used their best judgment as individuals, and that had some value. But their main dependence would be upon the Father's and the Son's making their abode with them through the presence of God the Holy Ghost.

It might as well be understood, once for all, that

true Christian progress will be better made in the line of one's own individuality. Religious memoirs and biographies are to many minds most discouraging and most harmful reading. They provoke a morbid longing for likeness which is only an absurd imitateness. Failing to accomplish the end of obtaining a resemblance to the spiritual hero or heroine it admires, the heart becomes sickly and morose and sentimental. It is really suggestive that when we desire to kindle and establish a drooping sensibility, we say to a man only the true words, "Be a man"; and to a woman, "Be a woman." These hours of separate experience are just the tests of what we are. They show manhood or prove womanhood; they fix personality. Let them fling on our very foreheads the conspicuous calmness of healthy thought; let them flush our cheeks with the ardour of a wholesome zeal; let them enliven our tread with the elasticity of some grand purpose, and throw all along the sweep of our limbs a feminine grace with a masculine force to it. And then, in the full vigour of a life which is worth something to cherish, we can leave ecstasies of desolation alone.

No one ever entertains different guests in precisely the formal way prescribed in books of etiquette. He adapts a welcome to each peculiar taste, if he knows it. It seems a fine stroke of genius in John Bunyan, when he pictures fresh objects in the Interpreter's House to be displayed to the various

pilgrims. Christiana wanted other sights than those Christian enjoyed, and Mercy needed something for which Old Standfast would not think to ask. Indeed, we are to remember that, though we may sometimes come to the same chambers of experience, we must not expect the identical beds will be offered for us to lie upon where previous believers slept. Nor must we fret ourselves with peevish disappointment if we learn that the orthodox and traditional prospects we had been told about are not going to be visible from our windows in the morning. Unto us as not unto the world will God manifest himself; and it may as well be added for our information, that unto one of us as not unto another will the disclosures be made. There have been already, no doubt, in this world some religious experiences which no one else on earth could ever have understood except the man who had them.

It is easy to learn, therefore, a new lesson. Let us begin to respect our own religious convictions truly. It is no use trying to get appreciated. We are no better in our chances surely than the Master we follow. A poor woman from her sick chamber crept up behind him once in a crowd just to touch the hem of his garment. She had a better appreciation of him than his disciples who made a great show of adhering to him. This is a fixed fact in religious history; it is always the lot of Christian experience — however it may be thronged and jostled

by a garrulous many — to be touched only now and then by a silent few. And there will be some hours in which it cannot be touched by any; when solitarily it will go forth into some Gethsemane garden, and, while an unobservant throng slumbers around it, fall on its face alone.

No; brave men and women must learn to do life's work without human help. The people who have accomplished the most will all assert when they are asked, that they never did anything well until an honest conclusion was reached in their own minds that they must go forward without sympathy from any others, doing their best by themselves. A man with a vast task to do must tremble when life and death hang on his endeavour. He would shrink back, but God will be sure to make his conscience forbid him in that. The true stand to take is this: accept a responsibility wherever it may be; do your best with it; trust to Almighty God to see you through with it; expect while you are under it some quick manifestations of help will be given according to the promise; so respect your convictions.

Take this case: a young follower of the Saviour suddenly discovers he has been placed in a position of wonderful and appalling importance; a teacher has been elected superintendent; a clerk has been summoned into partnership; an oldest daughter becomes the head of her old father's household; a pastor is called to his first charge; a school-girl assumes



care of an academy of children; take any new great place like this. The supposition is, that the Christian has been pushed into a field too large for him, too responsible for an inexperience so poor as his, too much for his strength, his health, or his education. Now the question is, What shall he do? He must do the work, and he cannot be helped. He falters when he reflects upon his exposure; he feels sure he cannot trust his judgment only. What shall he do? The answer to that is found in one verse of a psalm. Let him throw himself back on the promised help and presence of God, who has agreed to manifest himself at the last moment. It is safe for him to rely on his right reason, if he will be content to rest in the illumination God will send by the Holy Ghost. That Old Testament promise holds good to-day: "The meek will God guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way."

Let him not be disheartened if for awhile everybody doubts him. This wise world is full of minor prophets as noisy as ravens. He has yet to meet them and to bear with them. Off upon his eminence of duty he must stand, where the winds which always blow chilliest in lonely places are whistling around him. He may be silent, but he must be in earnest. Let him be true to himself, and do the thing which heart and conscience tell him is right. Let the hands be firm even if the feelings flutter. The world is asking, "Think he

will hold his own through it all?" No: any one can answer a question like that; no: but God can hold his own! For God through paths they have not known will lead his own! Now comes the fight; next to that comes the triumph; next to that comes the crown. For "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

So, then, we are bound to treat these apostles with respect, even though they made mistakes in their plans and procedures before the Day of Pentecost. They did the best they knew how. They lived up to what light they had. They gained some growth in wisdom and grace by experience. That week or two was not lost if it left them faithful still.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### *GAZING INTO HEAVEN.*

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"—  
ACTS i. 11.

ONLY one more scene remained, and we have every reason to reckon Peter as among those who were present at the ascension. Out on Olivet he saw Jesus rising through the air, parting his hands for the closing benediction. While he gazed through his tears into heaven, thinking a last thought of loyalty and love, who can picture the emotion of those devoted men around him! "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

The ascension of our Lord took place somewhere upon the Mount of Olives, not far from the village of Bethany. The leading transactions of divine grace in redemption have always been conspicuous

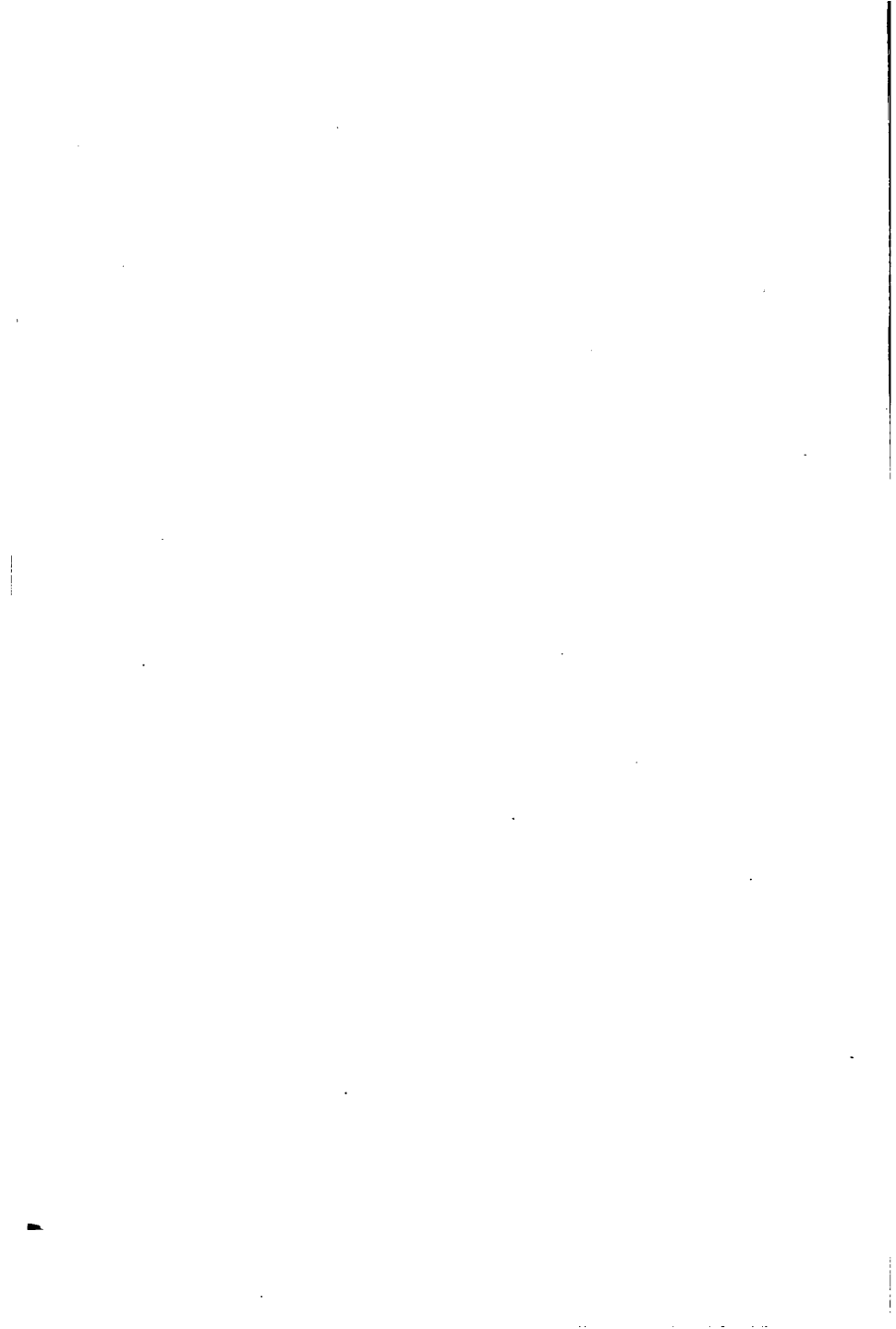
without being ostentatious. Sin was public; done in the face of the universe, before the eyes of every living intelligence. So the atonement was equally public; the crucifixion was on a hill; and the final triumph of him who led captivity captive was public. The Sanhedrin, sealing with their own official wax the sepulchre of Jesus, became the unwitting or unwilling witnesses to the power of the Father who raised his Son from the dead, to become the first-fruits of them that die in the Lord. It was the authentication which made noticeable the fact they sought violently to prevent, and made impossible the lie which they announced.

Hence, now, this ascension of the Saviour was bound to be public in order to convince the world, and certify his mission to the ages. A grand vision was in preparation for the disciples. Jesus was going to rise through the air to his old place at the right hand of his Father. The purpose of this publicity was not at all to force an unseemly display; but just to give the friends of the Saviour the right to declare for ever as Paul did to Festus, "This thing was not done in a corner."

So always thereafter in human history the ascension of the only-begotten Son of God into heaven uplifts itself between the Gospels and the Book of the Acts, like Mount Olivet between Jerusalem and Bethany, an exalted, immovable, prodigious fact; a landmark in time and in holy experience which



THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.



never could be missed while the world should stand.

In connection with this incident there occurs the mention of one particular, of which no record has been preserved in the four Gospels; this comes to us, in the mere preliminaries of ecclesiastical history, as given in the opening chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The last record we read before this was penned by the same author, Luke, but he does not tell us in his Gospel about this characteristic gaze of those wondering and broken-hearted men after the retreating form of Jesus.

Who were these personages that appeared so abruptly on the scene of that return to the skies? A mysterious companionship, — two figures in human forms and garments and speech, unannounced and evidently with authoritative commissions to take part in the august pageant, — that is all we see. If it were not for the unusual phraseology, if it had not made mention of the radiant attire they wore, it would be easy to suggest that these speakers were just *disciples*, merely two of their number, with stronger faith, perhaps, or brighter gift, or braver hearts, or more alert obedience, holding in steadier memory the words of Jesus concerning the sure reappearance which he would make by and by.

But men in white raiment have been met often before this in gospel history. These “glistening

garments," white as no fuller on earth can white them, always seem to be the mark of supernatural beings. It does not satisfy one at all to attempt to discharge this record of its meaning, by saying in a tame sort of way that two sanguine and courageous proselytes gave a quick exhortation to the backward and afflicted band of disciples, summoning them to cease lamentation and begin work.

What hinders our understanding that these unusual visitants were archangels? Nothing, except the simple fact that the record says they were "men." We remember there were two beings in white present on the mount of Christ's transfiguration; they were not angels, they were men; they came from heaven, but they were men nevertheless; and they showed their humanity so plainly that they were recognized by their names and offices. Up to this time there had been several men who had gone away to heaven without dying. These two were prophets, and their names had on the earth been Moses and Elijah. It is likely that both of them in turn had been translated; and now they appeared with Jesus in glory on the mountain-top. Surely, there is no impropriety in our conjecturing that they appeared here again, as some of our soberest commentators of the present day suggest. Such a supposition would relieve the account of much abruptness, and link it with reminiscences worthy of itself.



Simon Peter was present on the occasion when Moses and Elijah in the same white garments, and with the same august errand of witnessing to the glory of Jesus, had appeared before; and with him in the select companionship James and John had been associated. All of these disciples were brought up in Bethsaida close by Lake Gennesaret. They were distinctively "men of Galilee." These three men heard those two men — Moses and Elias — talking with Jesus concerning "the decease he should accomplish at Jerusalem." They were evidently intensely interested in the Messiah's mission upon the earth. Now if these men of Galilee had the understanding that these men in white raiment who were speaking to them were again in attendance on Christ, then the message they offered would be invested with a far mightier significance. The command, that they should cease gazing up into heaven, and the promise, that the same Jesus would come back before long in the same manner he went away — it could not be otherwise than that such a command and such a promise, no matter how solemn or rich in themselves, would be the more valuable to those desolate and mourning believers by reason of the significant authentication and endorsement they received, if delivered by these, the most distinguished and illustrious prophets the world ever knew.

But we need not waste time in seeking to find

out just who these supernatural visitants were. It was what they said that gave them the superior welcome. If any expositor thinks they were angels, there can be no special objection to his preference, for such terms are elastic.

"'T is only when they spring to heaven that angels  
Reveal themselves to you; they sit all day  
Beside you, and lie down at night by you,  
Who care not for their presence — muse or sleep —  
And all at once they leave you and you know them."

The message was this: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." The three things to be specially noticed in these words are, the name they are distinctively called by, the inquiry put to them, and the prophetic announcement with which they are counselled, checked, and comforted.

"Ye men of Galilee!" Ah! Simon had once shrunk back into denial when he heard that name applied to him, and got the taunts about a recognition growing out of his brogue: "Surely thou also art one of them, for thy speech bewrayeth thee! Thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto! Of a truth this fellow also was with him, for he is a Galilean!" That was what made this disciple begin to curse and swear.

But how different all this was now! When he

heard the angels in the parted sky say, "Ye men of Galilee!" we can imagine with what zeal of proud welcome his heart rose to greet the name he had despised. If he could, no doubt he would have answered like a soldier at roll-call: "Yes, indeed! I am one of them! Simon, son of Jonas, born in Bethsaida of Galilee! forty-eight years a fisherman with my father on the Sea of Galilee! I do know now the Son of man, Jesus, the Son of the Living God! I am to live and labour for him a while; he told me that! and I have an unalterable promise from his lips that I may die for him by and by!"

By this act of ascension everything was put to rights. If a Galilean could sit crowned and throned at the right hand of God, it is evident that Simon Peter and the rest would understand that no name in the speech of humankind could be dearer or nobler than this hereafter. How strangely true love for Jesus Christ lifts all contumely and obloquy endured for his sake! The reproaches of Christ are then glorious; for when one is a child, the offence of the cross evermore ceases.

"Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" There is censure in these words; a kind, gentle, affectionate, but genuine rebuke. These men in white raiment, whoever they were, meant to admonish those disciples at this supreme moment that such excessive mourning and measureless grief ought to be at an end. They must leave the mountain and let Jesus

the Christ go away in peace. Work lay open for them down in the plain. A great wail of disappointment and sorrow was out of place. The heavens were not going to be parted again for Jesus' return till he himself in his own way should keep his promise. Indeed, they were in the wrong.

We presume that most persons of thoughtful minds would detect in the name by which the men in white addressed the disciples at the ascension two suggestions at once. These would show oneness with Christ who had just ascended. For he had been called a Galilean. And the large body of the disciples came from Galilee. So to Galilee they owed an obligation, and owned a duty. It had given them Jesus; they must give it the gospel.

That is to say, while these disciples stood gazing up into heaven, they ought to have been off at work serving Christ. They were rebuked seriously for indulging an unhallowed curiosity concerning the future. It will be remembered that when they came together on that mountain, the earliest thing they asked Jesus was, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" This was not the first time they had urged that question; to repeat it now was little better than mere impertinence. And although he rebuked them, and told them they could not know God's unrevealed plans, they would not give it up. They gazed determinately into the sky, as if they would penetrate the secret yet.

There is much reinless speculation at the present time concerning the date of our Lord's second coming. The ancient rabbins used to say, "Perish the man who calculates the times and the seasons!" It is not for us to grow inquisitive or impatient. It matters little to us when Christ shall come; it matters everything to us that our whole work shall be finished, when the last trump shall herald his arrival.

The unparalleled impressiveness of this admonition to those disciples turned on the fact that such motives pressed on them for zeal. The great world needed the gospel without a moment's delay. The race was in expectancy. The whole creation was at the moment groaning and travailing in pain together, waiting for redemption. It was time to end sentiment, and spring at once to work. Christ was gone, but the Comforter was coming in his place. And all things were ready. The moment they went to duty, came Pentecost.

There are men who seem to think they can do nothing without what they call a "revival." They stand gazing up into heaven after a revival. Now nowhere does God's word bid us wait for any special outpouring of spiritual influence. Alas, what subtle forms of perversion the great adversary uses! What absurd measures of self-deception he persuades us carelessly to adopt! It seems at first glance exceedingly attractive to find one sitting devoutly in the

ashes, waiting for new grace just in order to go about doing good. But the word rings out as from a trumpet, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

Revival assumes a backwardness, and this backwardness is a disease, and needs medicine, food, exercise, and air. No man need ever hope to be well, as long as, hungry, and panting, and listless, he just sits down on the plaintive lookout for health. No man ever was revived who merely waited for a revival. The doing of a duty leads the way to success. God will do his part when we do ours. We need to begin to address sinners, to remove our stumbling-blocks, to grow urgent and importunate in prayer, to break with the world, and live wholly unto God. Then the work will go gladly on.

But now for their comfort these men in white added one sweet and authoritative promise: they should have Jesus sometime back again here on the earth. The same Nazarene Leader, with undiminished majesty and grace, should return in the same manner in which he went; there should be no danger of their missing him, for he would arrive in a like royal pavilion of cloud. How affecting it seems now to us to mark the plain commonplace consideration with which the Lord of Glory condescends to treat those unreasonable friends of his, whom he had just caused to be rebuked! He has hardly withdrawn the vision of his person from before their

eyes, when he — seeing what they could not, looking through vast reaches of distance they could not penetrate, beholding their upturned faces, so sad, so doubtful, so pitiably distressed — proffers two shining ones from among his swiftest messengers to tell them he is coming back soon, and is going to send now the Holy Ghost to care for them! “Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth?”

It is best to arrest our study here. Our main errand is to show how this interview affected the character and prospects of Simon Peter in particular, and of the other disciples as well. But it would be an unfortunate loss for us all to miss any of the counsel or comfort they received, when in our common humanity it might prove helpful to us.

There is in this question an affectionate expostulation with those who are under personal bereavement. When Jesus had kept telling these disciples that he should leave them before long, they had reverently listened, but received no settled impression from it. It is of no use ever to attempt to become prepared for the loss of a dear friend. The consciousness never arrives until the stroke has fallen. Now it seemed to these men all hopes were gone. They looked after Christ with unutterable dismay. Great longing possessed them for his immediate reappearing. No voice could ever speak

like his. We must never forget that the friends of Jesus loved him with an indescribable force of attachment. And now these bereaved mourners could not turn their eyes away from the sky.

They are not alone in the feeling. When any one has lost some precious friend, the imagination persistently dwells on death. Faith seems almost powerless to break the habit of brooding over the helpless sorrow. The wounded spirit remains just broken, gazing up into nothingness, sometimes even wishing it might fly away and be at rest.

But this cannot be indulged. Unsubmissive re-pining is wrong. We cannot waste life with wistful gazing after those whom God has taken. It is fortunate that God's plan for us is the most profitable. We must be on the alert for duty. Remember the encouragement there is for a mourner to work for Christ, found in the Psalm: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

We pity the wife who finds her plans of usefulness hindered by the burial of him who has helped her hitherto. We pity the old father who pauses in broken-hearted sadness by the bier of his eldest son. But we are sure that every mourner's eyes should be fixed on duty, and not on loss.

There is also a single thought suggested for an entirely different class of persons. Many who are



present here just now, I apprehend, imagine that this study of an incident in Simon Peter's life has rather a consoling interest to them because of its anxious aspect. He has such a wistful expression on his countenance; he is gazing up so longingly; he wants something to come to him from somewhere out of sight.

Perhaps no one is deluded more by such a conception than those who are really seeking their way to Christ. The devil deceives them into waiting for something before they can yield their hearts to God. Now salvation is not a thing to be vacantly gazed after. It will never fall down upon any one out of a cloud. Repent of your sins. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Surrender your life into his hands. Have done with this vague gazing, yearning, struggling after something you know not what. The entire work of turning to Christ begins with some commonplace step of commitment. Take a stand for Jesus. God's Spirit is with you. He does not need to be gazed after. End this indecision, and be at peace.

THE END.

